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BUILDING RESILIENCE – IN SUPPORT OF DEMOCRACY EDUCATION



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FOREWORD

Finnish people's views tend to be increasingly polarised. The media bombards children and young people with information on controversial issues on a daily basis. In social media, issues are often presented in an exaggerated, biased or even misleading manner. Strong media literacy is part of resilience, which refers to elasticity and an ability to cope with and adapt to unexpected situations. Resilience protects children and young people from being drawn towards extremist movements. Education and early childhood education and care build a value base that respects fundamental rights and provides skills, enthusiasm and a good model for active citizenship. The day-care centre and school can also halt development that has gone off on a wrong track by looking after everyone and ensuring everyone's inclusion in the community.

The task of teaching and early childhood education and care is to ensure that children and young people develop a balanced understanding of topics that may have a significant impact on their lives. The school and day-care centre must be places where all types of issues can be discussed safely while learning key competences of democratic citizenship, which include keeping an open mind, curiosity, and the ability to listen and willingness to understand others. Education and upbringing guide children and young people towards intercultural understanding and develop their skills in democratic debate, mediation and peaceful conflict resolution. And above all, their willingness and ability to put themselves in another person's position.

With the support of its democratic system, Finland coped with the refugee crisis of 2015. Terrorism remains a global threat, and hate speech, racism and hate crimes have also increased in Finland. Uncertainty and ignorance feed fear, which is expressed as aggressive behaviour and even hatred. The background to this may be social exclusion and experiences of unfair treatment and being an outsider. Violent extremism may also attract those who do not feel accepted and cannot find their way to good everyday life. This publication continues the efforts which started with the publication *Constructive interaction* and which aim to support the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism in the education sector. As a new perspective, this publication also addresses early childhood education and care.

The central idea is that pupils should also learn to discuss difficult and controversial issues in a constructive and critical manner and showing respect for others. At the day-care centre and school, each member of the community should be able to feel that they are appreciated and can influence common issues. The power of democracy lies in encountering and working together with people whose views are different from yours.

Hate speech or bullying are not accepted. A community that supports children and young people protects them from exclusion and prevents them from being drawn to extremist movements. A caring school community knows how to help children and young people who are facing difficulties and how to intervene in any development that gives rise to concern.

Leena Nissilä

Satu Honkala

COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S ACTIONS FOR REINFORCING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Kristina Kaihari

Counsellor of Education

Education is increasingly seen as the most effective way of preventing the rise of violence, racism, extremism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. An equal education system based on human rights, in which the curricula emphasise the objectives and contents of democracy and human rights education, is the best method of ensuring that everyone receives attention, promoting the learning and positive interaction of all children, and preventing exclusion. A key objective is developing a communal culture that promotes democratic inclusion in all schools – and across society as a whole.

Council of Europe

The basic task of the Council of Europe is to safeguard and develop human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law. Its work on promoting democracy and human rights education in the Member States is highly important. In the current situation of international politics, in particular, the Council of Europe has an increasingly important role in defending democracy. Cooperation on these issues has been stepped up between the Council of Europe, the European Union, UNESCO and the UN, especially through its 2030 Agenda.

Adopting binding norms and monitoring their implementation are the most important instruments in this work. This is why the 47 member states of the Council of Europe have adopted the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7. The basic principle of the Charter is promoting democracy and human rights in the member states and providing a way of disseminating good practice and raising standards throughout Europe and beyond. Finland is active in human rights issues in the Council of Europe and plays a strong role in developing human rights.

The **Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE)** project, which was launched in 1997 and completed in 2017, succeeded in strengthening cooperation and communication between the member states and improving the production, dissemination and recognisability in the member states of the Council of Europe's pedagogical materials promoting inclusion, active citizenship, human rights and democracy education.

EPAN

In 2018, the Council of Europe established the **EPAN Network (Education Policy Advisers Network)**. Its aim is to support the Council of Europe's efforts in the field of human rights and democracy education, particularly from the perspective of curriculum work, teacher education and the evaluation of education. At the centre of its work is integrating the so-called **Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)**, which

has emerged as the most important tool used by the Council of Europe in its educational activities in recent years, into member states' education policies, curricula and school practices. The framework itself is a comprehensive toolkit for educational policy-makers and educators crystallised around 20 competence areas.

As part of EPAN work, a representative of each member state has, with the help of the RFCDC, reviewed and reflected on the delivery of democracy and human rights education through the education policy and curricula of their own country, down to its practical-level implementation in schools. In Finland, all these competences can be found in the general sections, areas of transversal competences and sections on different subjects of the National core curricula. The CDCs have been integrated into the teaching in many ways throughout our education system. Kristina Kaihari, Counsellor of Education at the Finnish National Agency for Education, has served as the Finnish coordinator appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the EDC/HRE project and is now a leading expert in the EPAN network.

Currently, the key element is sharpening the focus on the practical delivery of democracy education in schools through experiential methods. It is important to inspire all children and young people to learn, engage in constructive interaction, and act in a spirit of good cooperation. Creating a culture of mutual respect and a positive atmosphere improves everyone's well-being and comfort, prevents bullying and exclusion, and allows everyone to face the future with confidence.



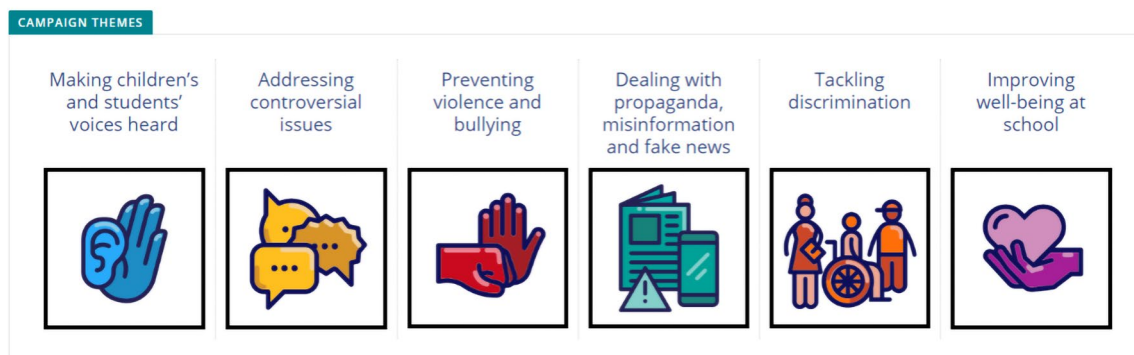
20 ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL AND DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE (RFCDC OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE)

Free to speak – safe to learn

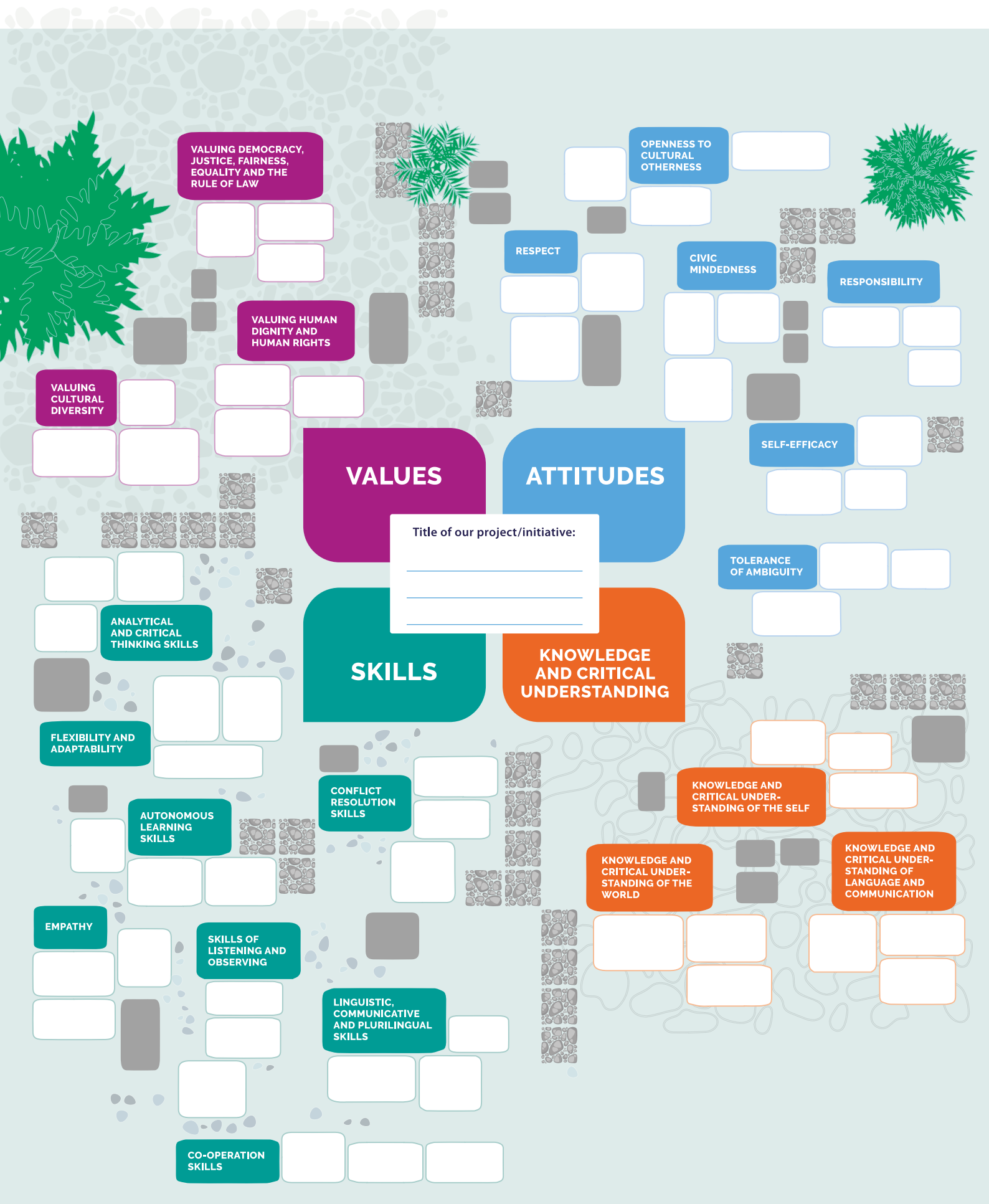
At the beginning of 2019, the Council of Europe launched a new campaign titled Free to Speak – Safe to Learn and the Democratic Schools Network (DSN) to support development work in school communities. The aim is to promote safety in school communities and freedom of expression while improving the teaching of democratic competences in practice. The campaign includes a component on tackling extreme thinking, and it is also linked to the implementation of the sustainable development goals. The participants may be pupils and students, teachers, school management and parents. Schools can work together with NGOs or other organisations. Schools can register with the Council of Europe's Democratic Schools Network (DSN) and report to it on their activities. The campaign has a particular focus on the six themes listed below, which each school can implement as they choose. It is likely that many schools already have suitable actions or projects underway. The quickest schools have already registered for this international network using the link below.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/why-a-campaign>

- Making children's and students' voices heard
- Addressing controversial issues
- Preventing violence and bullying
- Dealing with propaganda, misinformation and fake news
- Tackling discrimination
- Improving well-being at school



Everything starts with a caring attitude and creating a positive and encouraging atmosphere in which everyone can do their part. By taking other people into consideration, listening and doing things together, we can achieve a lot for the common good!



VALUING DEMOCRACY,
JUSTICE, FAIRNESS,
EQUALITY AND THE
RULE OF LAW

OPENNESS TO
CULTURAL
OTHERNESS

RESPECT

CIVIC
MINDEDNESS

RESPONSIBILITY

VALUING HUMAN
DIGNITY AND
HUMAN RIGHTS

VALUING
CULTURAL
DIVERSITY

SELF-EFFICACY

VALUES

ATTITUDES

Title of our project/initiative:

TOLERANCE
OF AMBIGUITY

ANALYTICAL
AND CRITICAL
THINKING SKILLS

KNOWLEDGE
AND CRITICAL
UNDERSTANDING

SKILLS

FLEXIBILITY AND
ADAPTABILITY

KNOWLEDGE AND
CRITICAL UNDER-
STANDING OF THE SELF

AUTONOMOUS
LEARNING
SKILLS

CONFLICT
RESOLUTION
SKILLS

KNOWLEDGE AND
CRITICAL UNDER-
STANDING OF THE
WORLD

KNOWLEDGE AND
CRITICAL UNDER-
STANDING OF
LANGUAGE AND
COMMUNICATION

EMPATHY

SKILLS OF
LISTENING AND
OBSERVING

LINGUISTIC,
COMMUNICATIVE
AND PLURILINGUAL
SKILLS

CO-OPERATION
SKILLS

PREVENTING VIOLENT RADICALISATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Kati Costiander

Counsellor of Education

Violent radicalisation and extremism can best be tackled through preventative work. Prevention is always more effective than dealing with the consequences. Knowing about, preventing and recognising these phenomena is also relevant to early childhood education and care. People continue to ask if this phenomenon really concerns early childhood education and care and young children. Yes, it does. Children may already have been exposed to the effects of violent radicalism in their living environment at an early age, and such propaganda and indoctrination are often produced and spread by their parents. Early childhood education and care supports children's attachment to society, and consequently it may also strengthen factors that protect them from radicalisation to violent extremism.

Early childhood education and care works closely together with all guardians, also those active in extremist movements. A confidential and positive atmosphere is needed to put the child's best interest first in this cooperation. When children are concerned, it should always be remembered that they cannot be held responsible for their guardians' activities and ideologies. For example, children whose guardians have participated in terroristic activities or children who have lived in war zones have not been able to choose their circumstances.

Violent radicalisation is based on an ideology that divides people into us and them and legitimises violence against 'them'. Marginalised children and young people who cannot make their voices heard are more susceptible to the promises made by recruiters than their peers. This is why we in Finland should also pay more attention to measures that prevent marginalisation, both among the native population and immigrants, and these efforts should start earlier, or already in early childhood education and care. For example, prevention includes experiencing acceptance and appreciation in one's community and strengthening children's ability to protect themselves from messages and influence inciting to violence in an age-appropriate manner. From a young age, it is important for children to belong to a group, make friends, and have experiences of participation, interaction and putting themselves in another person's position. All these skills are already practised in early childhood education and care.

Although discussing terrorism may feel difficult, we should be aware of the fact that not talking about or discussing matters may instil unnecessary fear in the minds of even young children. If children do not receive support for discussing these themes truthfully, they risk developing a fragmented understanding of them, and they may include in it their own interpretation of what could have happened or what they imagine happened in a given situation. It is the adults' responsibility to put what has happened into the right perspective and help children understand shocking events in a way that is suitable for their developmental level. Issues should be discussed truthfully with children, as they will inevitably hear about them from somewhere else.

ECEC organisers should have a ready-made operating model for their personnel for a

situation where violent radicalisation is observed. It is important that employees at the local level know whom to contact and that they follow the agreed practices. In order to avoid misunderstandings and overinterpretations, they should also be aware of the importance of not stigmatising anyone. Many things become clearer when you ask the relevant person a direct question.

There are children in ECEC whose guardians support some violent extremist ideology. At the same time, the guardians may pass on to their children their values and attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity, ethnic or religious groups or sexual minorities. It is particularly important for the future of children who have grown up in the sphere of violent extremism not to be excluded from the pathway to growth and learning.

The importance of early childhood education and care in preventive work

Early childhood education and care is a service that promotes equality and equity among children and prevents their social exclusion. The ECEC personnel encounter children's guardians on a daily basis and work closely together with them. The aim of this cooperation is to create continuity and safety in the children's lives. Bringing up issues directly helps develop the relationship between the personnel and the family.

The task of ECEC is to protect and promote children's right to a good and safe childhood. The underlying values of the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2018) govern all ECEC activities. The aim is to enable all children to feel valued and understood just the way they are.

Children are guided in expressing themselves, their opinions, and their thoughts. To enable children to feel that they are listened to, it is the personnel's responsibility to create an atmosphere in which everyone is respected. The most important thing for children is to have a reliable adult to whom they can tell or express things. Children who have not yet learned to speak often use other means to express their thoughts, concerns and issues that have come up at home.

The personnel are responsible for guiding children to respect human rights and to support children in their growth as persons. Growing as a person involves taking others into consideration, friendliness, fairness and the ability to feel joy for yourself and for others. It also involves acquiring the skills and willingness to do the right thing and act fairly. It is important that the objectives and contents of Me and our community, one of the learning areas in the National core curriculum, are discussed in teaching.

A good self-esteem, a sense of belonging to a community and the perception that there are genuine opportunities to participate and get involved are factors that protect children and young people from marginalisation. ECEC personnel ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate and influence matters that affect their lives, while laying a foundation for competences related to equity, equality, cultural and linguistic diversity and other democratic values.

Children's thinking and learning skills develop in interaction with other people and the environment, forming the basis for the development of other competences and lifelong learning. Acquiring and structuring information and being creative require creative and critical thinking. Education and teaching can be used to guide children in forming personal opinions and critically evaluating different ways of thinking and acting. The children are encouraged to ask questions and challenge things, but they also practise the skill of listening to, recognising and understanding different views.

It is important to discuss with the children ethical and moral issues, such as good and evil, friendship, telling right from wrong, fairness or causes of fear, sadness and joy. Ethical questions are discussed in a manner that enables the children to feel safe and accepted.

A sense of security lays the foundation for all learning and growth. Jointly agreed rules and operating methods help create a learning environment with a safe atmosphere that encourages showing respect for others and sharing responsibility. In a safe atmosphere, children feel they are allowed to show different emotions. The task of ECEC personnel is to help children in expressing their feelings and in self-regulation. The child needs time, an opportunity and a lot of support in adjusting to normal everyday life.

RADICALISATION – MYTHS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

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Preventing radicalisation has become an important political objective in recent years. Finland, too, has had a National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism since 2012. Almost every sector of society is today expected to address the prevention of violent extremism in its activities. This has forced many teachers, social workers, police officers and youth leaders to think about how radicalisation is relevant to their work. To most of them, violent extremism and terrorism have previously only been familiar from the news.

Preventing radicalisation has not been a new challenge only in Finland: in its current form, it is a fairly recent idea in general. The first action plans of this type were developed in the mid-2000s. Academic research on 'radicalisation' is also largely a phenomenon of the last 10 to 15 years, whereas the causes of political and religious violence have been studied for a long time.

The long-standing problem in the prevention of radicalisation has been determining what causes radicalisation and how the risk of radicalisation can be anticipated. A wide range of views of both questions have been expressed in public debate.

Many of the frequently repeated arguments and assumptions do not fully reflect the results of academic research. Attempts to find over-simplified explanations for complex phenomena is a widespread problem. This is why, when professionals consider their role and actions in the efforts to prevent violent extremism, it would be a good idea for them to pause to examine what fundamental assumptions their actions are based on and whether research findings support these assumptions.

Radicalisation is not a subtype of exclusion

One of the most common ways to perceive radicalisation is to interpret it as a subtype of exclusion. Through social challenges or life crises, an individual somehow becomes marginalised, grows bitter and turns against society. Signs of or susceptibility to exclusion are thus perceived as indicating a risk of radicalisation, and it is thought that radicalisation can be prevented by preventing exclusion.

This view is not entirely mistaken. Networks that perpetrate and support terrorist attacks have always attracted those who are adrift in life, many of whom can be considered marginalised. Terrorist movements have sometimes also deliberately sought new members among such persons. The attractiveness of Jihadist activities has been explained by the fact that young Muslims are more economically deprived than their peers on average. Growing up

in a broken home and different types of social exclusion often also come up in the context of radicalisation to right-wing extremism.

Nevertheless, there is no justification for considering social exclusion as a risk factor for radicalisation. First of all, very few of the socially excluded become involved in violent extremism. Exclusion does consequently not predict radicalisation in any reliable way. Secondly, all of those who join terrorist activities are not marginalised by any means. People end up with different roles in these movements for a variety of reasons and from many types of backgrounds. In fact, middle-class and educated people have historically been more likely to resort to terrorism as a form of protest.

While preventing social exclusion is a worthy goal for many reasons, its impact on violent extremism is inevitably limited.

Elusive profile of persons susceptible to radicalisation

In terms of preventing radicalisation, it would be extremely convenient to have some type of list or test for assessing a person's risk of radicalisation. This would facilitate many authorities' work considerably. In fact, several tools of this type do exist.

From the perspective of research, the idea of a checklist or questionnaire assessing the risk of radicalisation is quite problematic. The challenge is the same as when studying exclusion. While many of those who become radicalised have encountered significant losses or other life crises in the past, this is also true of countless others who do not become radicalised. The need to find a meaning for your life and belong to a group may be significant reasons for a radical group's attraction. However, these needs are shared by a high number of us, and most of us resolve them in completely different ways.

While many of those who become radicalised are quite young, it may also happen to older people. Most of those involved in violent extremism are men, but some are women. In other words, almost any criterion or question put on the list produces a huge number of false positives while excluding some of those who do become radicalised.

Radical thinking does not predict the risk of radicalisation

In addition to lists, efforts have been made to anticipate the risk of radicalisation by modelling the process leading to it. This is a worthwhile idea also in the sense that, in the light of research, 'how does radicalisation happen' is a much more productive question than 'who becomes radicalised'.

The policy adopted in most action plans for preventing violent extremism is setting the goal at preventing violent extremism, or radical acts, rather than radical thinking. This is an important line to draw, as any attempts of the government, whether direct or indirect, to steer the citizens' political and religious views sit ill with the principles of liberal democracy. In other words, people are allowed to hold radical views, whereas violent acts motivated by these views are a problem.

The radicalisation process to be modelled thus is the path that leads people to use of violence. The best-known models proposed in the context of efforts to prevent violent extremism consist of different types of staircase models or flowcharts. Their idea is that radicalisation in some way progresses in stages or steps.

The path to violent action is usually perceived as going through adopting an ideology and joining a group: the person first adopts radical ideas, is then likely to join a radical group and, as part of this group, commits acts of violence.

However, research findings show that in this respect, too, radicalisation is a more complex phenomenon than what staircase models would have us believe. Firstly, radicalisation of views, joining a group and acts of violence do not always follow in the same order. In fact, it is often difficult to put them in order at all.

As counterintuitive as it may sound, all those involved in violent extremism do not necessarily have an in-depth understanding of the radical ideology and its goals. It is not uncommon for involvement to be motivated by loyalty to friends who are part of the movement, for example, rather than the movement's goals. It is also very typical for a person to only properly internalise a radical ideology once they are already involved in the movement.

On the other hand, we also know that ultimately very few of those who hold radical ideas and accept the use of violence in principle actually commit acts of violence. In fact, there is evidence to indicate that those who do not take part in violent acts often have a more in-depth understanding of ideological issues than those involved in violent movements supporting the same ideology.

The basic problem with modelling the radicalisation process is that there is no single process which everyone would undergo. There are many paths to participation in violent extremism. In addition, when we examine radicalisation models, we should remember that the path to radicalisation does not inevitably take the most direct route towards a predestined outcome.

Interpersonal relationships in a key role

Rather than using profiles or paths, researchers describe the radicalisation process as the result of a number of different intertwined factors. The role and weighting of these factors vary from person to person.

A person's experiences of injustice at either a personal or societal level often contribute to radicalisation. A radical ideology helps them structure such experiences and possible solution models. Joining violent extremism may be motivated by different personal needs, including a need to find a meaning for your life and belong to a group. Interpersonal relationships are often important in all parts of the process, both as an incentive for joining and group pressure that maintains the activity.

If we were to pinpoint a single factor as the most reliable predictor of participation in violent extremism, it is interpersonal relationships. A large share of people join these activities because their friends or relatives are involved, or they follow in the footsteps of someone who they know and who is already involved. In fact, this applies to participation in all social

movements in a broader sense. However, having friends or relatives who are involved in such activities is not a fool-proof criterion for predicting radicalisation, either, as usually many friends and relatives of a person who becomes radicalised have no interest whatsoever in violent extremism.

As a matter of fact, it is very difficult to name any process, path or motive typical for persons becoming involved in violent extremism. In the final analysis, the motives and processes are very banal and ordinary.

Radicalisation and participation in violent extremism are not as unfamiliar a phenomenon in Western societies as is often suggested. Western popular culture is in fact full of stories about people who join a violent struggle for their group and values against a power they consider illegitimate or unjust. The only difference is that these stories are in most cases not referred to as narratives of radicalisation, as the changes in behaviour we usually call radicalisation are considered negative and completely condemnable.

Not only an individual but also a societal phenomenon

In addition to the prevention of violent extremism, the word 'radicalisation' itself is actually a relatively new term in this context. Academic research only started using it once it had become part of public debate and the political speech.

Referring to radicalisation is a way of talking about violent extremism typical of our times, in particular. After 2001, the debate on political and religious violence became polarised and more aggressive. While a need to somehow intervene in its underlying causes was identified, discussing these causes was very difficult. In particular, the link between terrorism and such wider societal issues as inequality, discrimination or the Western countries' foreign policy was a sensitive issue, and any attempts to emphasise this link were readily understood as attempts to justify terrorism.

In this situation, actions labelled as preventing radicalisation were a more comfortable way to intervene in violence using so-called soft means that was politically acceptable. From the beginning, the discussion on radicalisation has been characterised by examining the causes of violence specifically through the individual and as a consequence of the individual's vulnerabilities and needs. This has made it possible to deal with radicalisation as an unpolitical phenomenon and mainly a social problem.

No matter how much we would like to treat radicalisation as something individual and unpolitical, it will not turn it into this type of a phenomenon. Violent extremism is at all times strongly linked with the broader phenomena of social unrest and development of its own era, even if contemporary onlookers cannot always see this very clearly. The specific objective of those involved in such movements is to exert political influence.

In efforts to prevent violent radicalism, a realistic approach is therefore needed regarding what they are capable of achieving. As this is not a phenomenon that can be explained by individual factors alone, it also cannot be solved by measures that focus on supporting the individual. This does not mean, however, that the actions could not be highly significant for the lives of individuals.

Finally, we should bear in mind that the societal impacts of violent extremism are not limited to the actions of radicalised individuals and groups. The way in which the threat of violent extremism and acts of violence influence the attitudes and behaviour of the general public witnessing them has at least an equally great impact. Preventive work may also come with unexpected side effects, which can have a significant impact on who is considered suspicious in society and who feels they are under suspicion and observation.

CONFRONTATIONS OF IDENTITY AND CONFLICT IN SCHOOLS

Miriam Attias

This article explores the importance of responding to situations of polarisation and radicalisation that can occur when identities clash.

What matters is not the issue but its relationship with the environment.

Schools often worry about encountering issues of identity and conflict. However, it is important that teaching staff are equipped with the knowledge and tools to normalise the conflict and tackle the issue, as these confrontations are key opportunities for preventing attitudes leading to violence, violent extremist ideologies and extremism. While they may be uncomfortable, embarrassing or difficult situations educators must use the opportunities they present to allow dialogue between opposing groups.

It is now widely accepted that problems encountered by people with a disability are more about their relationship with their environment than by the disability itself. A person's functional capacity is restored when their relationship to the environment is improved. For example, if the functional capacity of a person is hampered by the fact that their legs do not carry them, a wheelchair and ramps will enable their mobility. Therefore, the disability no longer completely limits their functional capacity. In this case, the only limitation is the stigma in the minds of those around them, whether they limit or enable the person with the disability to have a voice and opportunities. This stigma determines the types of relationships this person can have with their environment.

Once a diverse group of young people were talking about what it is like to go shopping. A young person of Roma heritage wanted to know if his peers were followed around by security guards when they shopped. They joked about what their response would be in this situation. For example, they could ask the security guard to push their shopping trolley so that he can get a better look at what products they were buying. A young person with cerebral palsy remarked that the situation described by his Roma friend actually sounded refreshing; no matter how hard he tries to establish contact with those around him, he often does not succeed and it is really hard to get help when he is looking for something. People fail to see him. At most, they communicate with his assistant, bypassing him. There is nothing wrong with his understanding he just finds it difficult to produce speech, but this problem can be eliminated when his assistant can interpret. After this, the only thing that hampers his relationship with the environment is the stigma in the minds of other people and their practise of excluding him from the conversation. They do not ask how they can best communicate with him, they simply ignore him as they either do not know what to do or think this is the best option.

As with disabilities which cannot be healed, and in which the attitudes and structures of the environment have great significance, confrontations of identity that can cause polarisation and radicalisation cannot be simply remedied and are affected by the attitudes and structures they encounter.

Situations of conflict that arise from clashes in identities inherently spark emotive and divisive discussions which often fuel the situation. Rather than paying attention to the clash in identities we should focus on their relationship to the environment. Are disagreements, diversity and strong opinions acceptable in the classroom? Or do we prefer to avoid an issue that may lead to conflict? How should we treat a person with a strong opinion? How quick are we to label a student like this as the difficult one who always argues? And how quickly does this person assume the role of the one who always incites the argument? They may have in any case already been labelled as the 'difficult one' and for this reason they will not be held accountable for their views, as others no longer have the energy to disagree or manage them. The attitudes of their peers and their teacher may fuel their anger.

Issues and situations associated with the confrontation of identities are problematic as they are inherently personal. They relate to social identity and the reference groups we belong to, even if we never even thought about it. The 'gut feeling' reactions associated with them are caused by the fact that polarising conversations challenge our perception of our own personal values and identities, which we may not even be aware of until the issue arises. The more important the topic is, the stronger the emotional response it may unexpectedly evoke. This is why the discussions related to cultural or religious traditions, and challenges made to those traditions, illicit strong emotional reactions. If you feel your emotional responses do not conform to the prevailing way of speaking or behaving, or are far from being politically correct, you conceal them. This causes stress, which gives rise to a need to protect and defend yourself.

If there is no space for examining such emotional responses is given in the classroom and an exaggerated effort is made to prevent uncomfortable situations, we may inadvertently create a situation where issues are just swept under the carpet, thus building tension. Such tension is later released. This could be in a safe place and with safe people, with whom one can be themselves and speak their mind without being censored. Alternatively, it may manifest itself suddenly, as an act of violence or aggression which is seen as out of character from the aggressor.

When confrontations of identity, polarisation and radicalisation insinuate themselves into official settings, for example a professional workplace, the first conflict to be resolved is the dichotomy between the personal and the professional. It may touch them on a personal level but they must respond as their professional role dictates. This is of utmost important as a teacher. The conflict between professionalism and emotional responses is emphasised in the school environment where a matter-of-fact approach, conventional and formal behaviour, consensus and avoiding disturbances are valued.

'A matter-of-fact approach' often means focusing on facts and using norms as the reference point. However, emotional responses have been evoked anyway. When someone is radicalised and starts provoking confrontations, suggesting simplistic explanations of identity, our instinctive response is to consider, often silently, whether we agree or disagree: are we part of this group or separate from it?

Our values may be kept underneath the surface, but when we are provoked or antagonised they rise. At the very least, they cause irritation by violating the norm. We have nothing to do with this issue. This is not an appropriate topic here. We do not want conflict in this classroom. We must return to the curriculum.

On identity

Identity is both personal and social.

Your personal identity relates to who you are and who you want to be. Among other things, it is about behaviour, characteristics, conscious willingness to be a certain kind of person, interests, desires and values.

Social identity is composed of different roles and group memberships, the experiences of belonging to different categories, including gender, nation, age, class, ethnic group, religious community or subculture. It is also the meanings you attach to these categories at any one time. The memberships and meanings vary in different contexts and life situations (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2017). In other words, your identity is highly multidimensional and, rather than stable and fixed, something that changes and develops in different situations, over your lifetime and in interaction with others.

In addition to your characteristics, your identity is influenced by what you think about yourself and how others perceive you. Sometimes your identity is not in your own hands. If you have never stopped to think about who you are, where you come from and who you want to be, the perceptions of the environment gain excessive influence and your identity is shaped by other people's expectations, assumptions and suggestions. A well-formed identity, being respected as an individual and having self-determination lay a solid foundation for healthy choices and healthy relationships.

One factor that strengthens social identity and its significance is our tendency to think in terms of groups. The word 'group' insinuates itself into our language as if by accident when we talk about age, class, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, political opinion or language. Even though these factors are merely categories on which group formation could be based. Although we know that such categories as community, nation, tribe, culture or ethnic group are not closed homogeneous entities, thinking in terms of groups persists. The problem is that the more we talk about groups, the more real they become (Brubaker 2013).

Belonging to a group is useful and – at instinctive level – even vital, and this is why we have such strong emotional responses to anything to do with groups and social identity. For this reason, small conflicts that have not been dealt with, or which are experienced as having been dealt with unfairly, can easily give rise to confrontations and conflicts. When a conflict is caused by a group identity, it automatically touches on a larger group of people than just the individual who was personally involved. We have a natural tendency to maintain a positive self-image and favour our in-group over an out-group. However, a strong social identity and the feeling of belonging to a particular group do not automatically mean negative attitudes towards others. Research in social psychology has found that negative attitudes are more often connected with rootlessness and a tendency to favour your own group based on fundamentalism and a sense of superiority.

When a person's reference group is subjected to disrespect, discrimination or some other threat, they will use different strategies to realise these tendencies, which we should recognise. For example, they may:

- 1) strive to improve their personal status by turning their back to their group and conducting identity negotiations in order to become part of other groups (demonstrating it, for example, by their clothing and the way they talk);
- 2) strive to improve the status and reputation of the entire group they represent by highlighting its positive values and 'sacredness';
- 3) attempt to improve their group's status in the hierarchy by discriminating against and oppressing others;
- 4) strive to maintain their self-image by remaining with their group, isolating themselves and turning inwards.

By recognising the influence the group has on the individual and the impact of the in-group/out-group dynamics, we gain a better understanding of students' reactions and actions (even if they were very different from our own!) and can use this as an opportunity to start a deeper and more meaningful discussion.

In practice: how to support identity in schools

Consequently, identities can be supported at school with at least two approaches. Firstly, through strengthening the existing identities of the student population by encouraging them in self-reflection and self-awareness. Secondly, by creating an atmosphere which addresses the flexibility and situation-specific nature of identity and creating a safe place in which everyone is accepted as themselves.

Everyone should also be given the opportunity to define and redefine themselves. While identity is an endless source of interesting discussions, no norms, roles and ready-made labels should be offered in them.

When leading discussions, the teacher or facilitator needs to be aware of the different backgrounds of the students and decide whether to bring these personal stories into the discussion or try to keep it generalised.

The laws of group dynamics affect the roles of group members. Certain roles are on offer, and the universal law of dynamics requires that they are filled. It is a good idea to give the students an opportunity to practise taking on roles that are different from their typical ones. This can be done by influencing group dynamics and by varying the composition of and instructions issued for small groups and discussions. For example, if a pupil has become known for their vocal and uncompromising political opinions, they can easily become trapped in that role, which quickly becomes constraining. If someone is repeatedly disruptive, we should determine if their objective is to be visible, intervene in a situation, talk about the actual topic, or something else. By understanding what drives them to repeatedly assume the same, narrow role, we can offer them other operating methods that serve their interest.

On radicalisation and violent extremism

What is the extremism we wish to prevent? It has been defined as; 'defending extreme acts or views', or as being prepared to use or actually using violence. It is often defined in relation to the 'middle ground' of society or norms, which means that the definition itself marginalises people who raise the conflict. Violent extremism is often considered a characteristic of the 'others'. We should be careful. If we use this term for labelling people, it begins to grow stronger. And if the labels take over and gain too much control over what we see, we may start managing the wrong problems and reinforcing the wrong aspects (Berger 2019).

How, then, should we deal with a student with radical opinions? Rather than being something negative, radicalisation can be viewed as a motivating action for issues that are important and to promote active participation in them. Questioning norms and breaking boundaries are part of being young. Young people provoke confrontations to attract attention, to be acknowledged and to strengthen their identities. However, extremism is more than this. It creates and fuels confrontations in order to rid itself of the out-group, by violence if necessary (thanks to Panu Artemjeff for clarifying this idea).

Situations of conflict that arise from clashes in identity that may cause radicalisation and polarisation are associated with a need to perceive one's life as significant. Your story is valued and people in your community are worthy.

Needs, narratives and networks

Different models have been proposed to forge a path away from radicalisation or violent extremism. The Three N's model: Needs, Narratives and Networks is one approach. It pinpoints clear junctures for interventions in educational institutions at the level of thinking and action. The process of radicalisation leading to violent extremism combines three factors: needs, narratives and networks (Kruglanski, Bélanger & Gunaratna 2019). First comes a need for personal significance. Then you find a narrative which you can identify with and experience as your own. You allow this narrative to be your guide in your quest for significance, direction and purpose. The third determinant of radicalisation is other people and networks that confirm the individual's experience, validate the narrative and reward its heroes with respect and adoration.

Accordingly, the school can prevent violent extremism at these three levels.

Needs.

Once a need for significance has been identified, the student can be supported in seeking ways to fulfil that need that does not lead to violence against others. They may be asked a series of questions to help them gain awareness of their needs. What do you find important? How would you like things to be? Which narrative describes you as the hero of your own life?

Narratives

The narratives of extreme ideologies are thin and uncompromising. Through storytelling, the original narrative can be developed. Rather than taking it away from the narrator, it can be

used as a starting point for widening and deepening the narrative and giving it new nuances and perspectives. A person will not give up their initial narrative until it has been heard in full. If the stories being told meet the individual or groups' need of being acknowledged (Artemjeff 2020), everyone can identify with the narrative. This enables the non-violent co-existence of people and groups. For the part of identity, one way of defusing group conflicts is finding a common 'umbrella identity' which the members of both groups can identify with. Rather than force-feeding that uniform identity to anyone, this means creating a narrative that can accommodate several sub-narratives. Methods for this include timeline work, in which the group members work on their family histories and find points that have a connection to the group's or community's shared history. The idea of sharing a common identity in the school they attend or the neighbourhood they live in can be introduced.

Networks

Narratives gain strength when they are acknowledged together. This is what radicalisation is based on too: the narrative gathers strength when people within the bubble experience it as their shared story and acknowledge it together. Therefore, it is essential to create situations where people and groups are brought together to view, discuss and build shared narratives. When people encounter others and join diverse networks, this exposes them to different perspectives, and when they are heard and acknowledged, they have a possibility of realising themselves and feeling significant. The school is an ideal place to build shared networks.

The more divisive a topic, the more carefully the environment needs to be prepared and constructed. We should not bring people together to face difficult issues without preparation. It is up to the teacher leading the discussion to ensure that the situation is safe. Incompatible value and identity conflicts can be discussed constructively when the issues are examined together in a dialogue through personal experiences. When constructive discussion in which differing views are respected becomes the norm, working relations between people and population groups will be possible. Methods for facilitating discussions of this type do exist. (Kangasoja 2020)

Conflicts that cause polarisation

Polarisation originates from a confrontation and distances groups of people from each other. It is one of the basic laws of group dynamics, which means that all groups, communities and societies are to some extent polarised. Consequently, polarisation as a phenomenon should be normalised. It also has its useful functions. Force and counterforce balance each other out. In the context of radicalisation, the tendency of groups and communities to polarise keeps the 'extreme ends' in check and can prevent violent, rapidly escalating extremism from occurring.

However, polarisation is a potentially dangerous phenomenon. It is driven by emotion and produces tension and conflict. It thus provides fertile ground for hardening violent attitudes and, consequently, violent radicalisation. Therefore, knowing how to work with polarisation is vital. If allowed to escalate, uncontrolled polarisation may lead to a spiral of hatred and violence. Rather than allowing images and language based on black-and-white thinking and violent attitudes to take over completely, space must be made to explore broader and deeper narratives. If there is too much consensus, something else is lacking. A freedom to express

yourself, to be confused, react or be heard. As polarisation is always present, it is in danger of being pushed under the surface. Before we can defuse it, it must first be acknowledged.

Bart Brandsma, a Dutch theoretician, has presented a frame of reference for examining your own attitudes and position in polarisation. This work was carried out in Finland as part of the depolarize.fi project and as part of the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education's training programme, 'Prevention of violent extremism at educational institutions' in 2018–2020.'

As a phenomenon, polarisation is similar to conflict. However, the difference between polarisation and conflict is that conflict has specific participants and occurs within a time and place. In other words, a conflict has owners: people who are part of it or actively avoid it. The dynamics of polarisation resemble a frozen conflict, in which nothing actually happens but there are tensions beneath the surface.

Three fundamental laws of polarisation

A more abstract phenomenon than conflict, polarisation is concealed under tensions. It follows three fundamental laws:

5. Polarisation is a thought construct – *us and them*. As we noted before, this thought construct is neutral in itself and found everywhere. If it grows excessively strong and takes on a fundamentalist aspect, this becomes a problem.
6. In order for polarisation to grow, it must be fed. It is fuelled by identity discourse: the use of discourse to define the identity of a group. For example, this can be done repeatedly with statements such as: 'They always do that', 'They are like that', 'They never'. The debate in favour and against immigration, for instance, revolves around groups and is highly polarised, as if there were two uniform groups, 'immigrants' and 'mainstream population'. However, the idea of such groups' existence is reinforced strongly when people are classified as members of one group or the other, and when membership in a certain group is understood as a characteristic that defines the individual.
7. Polarisation is an instinctive emotional reaction. Consequently, the development of polarisation cannot be influenced by facts, rather it is centred around feelings.

Polarisation and conflict need each other. A conflict may generate a thought construct which drives polarisation. The thought construct can then provide a framework for interpreting conflicts. Conflicts, and especially identity-based interpretations behind the conflict, provide fuel for polarisation. Polarisation, or division and segregation of groups, in turn serves as fertile ground for conflicts.

Five roles that affect polarisation

Polarisation causes people to take on different roles:

1. **Pushers**, who provoke the development of polarisation through hate speech as well as by denigrating and blaming the other group.

2. **Joiners** chose their side when they have formed a perception that the issue is right, necessary or legitimate. They often have a certain reservation, a 'disclaimer' as part of their discourse, and in most cases their views are not quite so extreme.
3. **The silent** are those people in the middle; being in this group gives no indication of their views or motives as the group is highly diverse. The people in the middle may be indifferent or highly committed, or have more nuanced views and make a conscious effort to stay in the middle. Professionals and authorities should also be in this group, as they should be easily approachable for the representatives of all population groups.
4. Other people often end up assuming the role of **bridge builders**. They wish to influence the way in which the 'extreme ends' label the other population group and to invalidate uncompromising ideas based on prejudice. A bridge builder wishes to mediate and resolve the disputes between the two groups. Despite their good intentions, bridge builders often unintentionally reinforce polarisation, adding fuel to it in the form of identity discourse. While the **bridge builders** strive to reject the arguments behind the pushers' hate speech, they end up reinforcing the dichotomy between groups.
5. The role of a **scapegoat** is handed out when polarisation is already quite advanced. As the situation escalates, the silent majority in the middle dwindles. In this situation, remaining neutral becomes impossible. Scapegoats are usually identified as the bridge builders or those who are the last to pick their side and are therefore called naive. The pushers also cast the authorities in the role of scapegoats by claiming that 'they are doing nothing'.

As it becomes increasingly difficult to stay in the middle, polarisation advances. The status of polarisation and the tensions it causes can be measured by how well the people in the middle are tolerated. The people in the middle group are accused of being naive, and they are made to feel that they must pick a side. The pushers' most important objective is gaining visibility, which has a key impact on polarisation development. When polarisation and the pushers become more visible, more and more people choose their side, and the pushers move further towards the extreme end. The phenomenon becomes self-perpetuating, as in a polarised situation, they are forced to express more and more extreme views in order to gain visibility. The pushers thus drift further and further away from the middle.

Five changes needed to mitigate polarisation

How, then, can such situations be defused? A neuropsychological study by Hasson & al, 2019 found that broadening the perspective, or seeing things from the viewpoint of the other group, advances understanding and empathy and improves relations between groups. How simple, but how difficult in practice! How can this be done in real life?

The objective of Brandsma's polarisation model is to help identify polarisation as a phenomenon in order to control it. While few wish polarisations to advance, many of us influence its progress. The dynamics of polarisation are associated with an enormous number of pitfalls and unintentional actions. Consequently, being aware of how the phenomenon works and how your actions influence it is paramount. This frame of thought can be applied to analysing situations that arise and taking appropriate and well-timed action. Dialogue is not always the right answer. When emotions are running high and the parties mainly wish to perform, dialogue can even be harmful from the perspective of defusing confrontations. The type of dialogue used to explore conflicts is based on different principles than dialogue intended for defusing confrontations.

1. Conflicts as learning situations

It is important to know the difference between a conflict and polarisation. Conflicts are situations in which there is anger, direct violence or a threat of violence. They have a place, a time and participants. Dealing with conflicts between the parties is important. Unresolved conflicts feed polarisation, for example if the quarrelling parties are merely separated from each other and punished; this gives rise to dissatisfaction and experiences of injustice as the parties' perspectives on the issue are not recognised and acknowledged. A conflict is a learning opportunity. When it is dealt with following the principles of mediation, it gives the parties an experience of being heard and having a constructive discussion, which can also teach lifelong skills. It is important to note that confidentiality is vital when dealing with a conflict. Dialogue used to process conflict differs from public dialogue. Building trust, good preparation, allowing the parties' ownership of their conflict and the experience of being included in resolving the situation are vital. The parties will be more strongly committed to the solutions if they are given a level of self-determination.

2. Involving the quiet ones who are usually not heard

When a more theoretical 'confrontation' than a conflict is being dealt with, in other words a discussion topic that potentially intensifies confrontations, the dialogue should be prepared differently than dialogue aimed at dealing with a conflict. Dialogue aiming to defuse confrontations is preventive or conciliatory in nature. When conflicts arise, they must be dealt with. No amount of public dialogue following the principles of defusing confrontations will make them disappear.

The first principle of defusing a confrontation is choosing the target group. In confrontational situations, the forum is often dominated by the most vocal 'extremists'. The attention is focused on pushers and joiners. Visibility effectively strengthens polarisation. Dialogue aimed at defusing polarisation takes place with the silent people in the middle; those who are not usually listened to. They are the opposing force to polarisation, black-and-white thinking and the resulting provocation.

3. Choosing a dilemma that invites reflection

In order to achieve a meaningful discussion with those in the middle, their real concerns must be addressed. This has already been understood by the pushers, for whom the silent ones are a specific target. While the pushers are familiar with the concerns of the silent majority, they offer the assumed characteristics of the other group as the explanation. The bridge builders, on the other hand, forget about the silent people in the middle as they strive to build a bridge between the two extreme ends. This causes the bridge builders themselves to focus on group identities, or the thought construct devised by the pushers, as well as factual information and identity discourse. This strengthens the polarisation development, even if the bridge builder's intentions were to reinforce positive rather than negative images. While this may be more comforting than the pushers' discourse, it does not defuse confrontations or make it possible to get away from 'representing groups'.

A topic that defuses polarisation is, rather than an argument, a dilemma which invites people to reflect on topics relevant to them. From identity discourse and characterisation of groups of people, the discussion should be steered towards loyalty discourse, which invites the participants to reflect on what their personal thoughts are and what they can do about the issue at hand.

4. Initiators of dialogue must be impartial and listen

Dialogue aimed at depolarisation must be conducted on neutral ground and in a listening atmosphere. The language of the facilitator must be neutral. This is why it is important for them to choose their words carefully. If they use the terms of one of the interest groups, this makes the other group apprehensive and may even exclude them. Open questions and a listening atmosphere make it possible to deal with different views, real concerns and questions that worry people, as well as enable each individual and group to feel represented and included.

5. Appreciative tone

If the goal is to defuse confrontation, there is no room for judgemental attitudes. The aim is to widen and deepen thin narratives and perspectives, and thus find common ground. Rather than about right or wrong, depolarising dialogue is about giving visibility to different perspectives, interests and needs. This can be achieved if the dialogue is conducted in a genuinely respectful tone.

Pitfalls and how to avoid them

Contacts between people belonging to different groups do not automatically result in positive attitudes. As we noted before, dialogue – at least not without preparation – is not always a good idea. Often teachers are present when the conflict initially rises and may need to defuse the situation, go away and prepare, before reinitiating dialogue between the groups. We should think about dialogue as a process for which we prepare well, ensuring that the parties who are to meet each other are willing and prepared to advance their understanding and be heard. Interaction does not automatically defuse violent attitudes. For a long time, it was thought that contacts reduce prejudice (the contact hypothesis) and that familiarisation generates positive attitudes.

Prejudice is often excused by the argument ‘we have never come across something like this before’. This is problematic. For example, the Roma have been in Finland for 500 years, and the ‘immigration debate’ during the Jewish civil rights struggle, which extended from the 19th century until 1917, sounded very similar to what we hear today (Jacobsson 1951). Debate around migration is hardly new. Moreover, the reactions sparked by the #metoo campaign and the fact that, while the Pride movement has grown year by year and an equal Marriage Act is in force in Finland, sexual and gender minorities are subjected to hate violence on a daily basis, showing suspicious attitudes towards members of the LGBTQI communities. In 2019, the Finnish Government appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deal with and officially recognise the Sámi people’s history and historical traumas. However, this has not been enough to persuade Finnish people to accept the Sámi perspective, as we found out when Pirkka-Pekka Petelius, an actor and a Member of Parliament, extended an apology to the Sámi people for his disparaging comedy acts filmed in the 1980s.

What do these situations have in common? At least the fact that not all types of interactions are equally useful and don’t reach everybody. If we value multiple perspectives, diverging narratives and desire a non-violent coexistence, then giving equal time to hearing these perspectives is paramount. The contact hypothesis has thus been updated. Today, it is believed that positive relationships between groups are promoted by contacts which are based on equality, common objectives and cooperation and which are supported by society (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2017).

Power relations between the minority and the majority are important to recognise in this conversation. Rather than occurring in a vacuum, the groups' attitudes and the relationships between them are anchored to the structures of society around them. Historical and other collective narratives as well as societal structures maintain certain attitudes and power relationships. The majority has always been 'normalised' (thanks to Giovanna Esposito for the concept of "normalised"). When we talk about racialised people, their opposite number is not 'mainstream population' or the 'majority' but 'normalised people', because in the same way as racialisation hampers people's actual possibilities of realising themselves in society, normalisation also maintains certain perceptions and a hierarchy. This hierarchy does not give equal space to hearing the personal stories of individual. There is evidence that while positive contacts support the majority to view the minority in a positive light, they have less effect on the minority's attitudes towards the majority. In other words, encounters affect the majority and the minority differently (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2017).

If the interaction remains superficial, where the majority are exposed to the story of a minority as a performance, telling them of their life experience, it can in fact reinforce stereotypes instead of challenge them. Such encounters do not generate stories that widen and deepen narratives, and they thus fail to create effective relationships and genuine connections between people.

The way in which the encounters are organised is the key. Teachers and facilitators should take care not to promote 'performing'. It is worth paying attention to the symmetry of encounters. If the majority population always appears as 'normalised' and minorities as representatives of their group, or interesting and exotic characters who are narrowly interpreted in terms of their membership in a single group, most of the attention is focused on the minorities. From the perspective of someone belonging to the majority, this may provide new knowledge and a new perspective and be interesting, especially if the performance does not threaten their dominant position. However, such activities will not eradicate the black-and-white and stereotypical 'us' and 'them' mentality, which underlies confrontation and polarisation.

Performing as representatives of their group can momentarily give minorities the feeling of being seen and heard and thus acknowledged, but this does not enable genuine interaction and exchange of ideas, and thus there will be no change in their attitudes or in their position in the hierarchy.

What is the consequence of this for the 'majority', those who belong to the normalised mainstream population? If they are only exposed to 'attitude-shaping education' and asked to have a positive attitude towards 'them', their own personal experience is not heard. Dialogue aimed at defusing black-and-white thinking should therefore always be planned to allow all voices to be heard, allowing equal opportunities for bringing up personal experiences and personal values in the dialogue.

How, then, can we provide information on the existence of different groups in society? Information is necessary, as it responds to the need of the minority to be acknowledged (thanks to Maryan Abdulkarim for clarifying this idea). The school is an excellent place for spreading information about a country's history and society, not only from a single viewpoint but from the perspectives of different groups. Which milestones of history are important for different groups? When have different groups acquired civil rights and through what kind of struggles was this achieved? This way, different minorities can be made visible and

normalised as part of a common story. Representing the group's experiences should not be left to a single individual. Schools can play a role in making this gathering and sharing of information a collective endeavour.

Conclusion: attention must be given to the building of relationships rather than the issue itself.

It boils down to this: If we are to prevent polarisation and radicalisation that can occur between individuals and groups we must focus on building relationships. We cannot ignore difficult topics. Instead, we must focus on who we talk to and how we talk to them. The phenomena of polarisation is only exasperated by limiting and controlling how conversations take place. Creating dialogue and exploring these things as a group will result in constructive discussions and build functional relationships, which in turn make the community strong and resilient in a crisis. Students must be supported in having these conversations and not encouraged to ignore what is difficult to discuss. There are resources available to help teachers facilitate these vital conversations, including the [Public Conversation Project](#), and the [Timeout method of constructive dialogue](#) contain plenty of materials for leading constructive dialogues) as well as the Finnish National Agency for Education's guide [Constructive interaction](#). (Elo & al. (eds.), 2017).

When the 'normal' is disturbed, the narrative of the 'normal' is interrupted. The most powerful method of building crisis resilience, togetherness and security is telling a story in which everyone can be included. Confrontations can be defused when the starting point is a shared narrative, not one that excludes. If the story becomes powerfully inclusive it builds a sense of shared belonging.

In defusing confrontations and dealing with conflict, listening is a radical act.

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GLOBAL COOPERATION AND NATIONAL MEASURES

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The Maastricht Declaration of 2002 defines global education as education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all. Extremist movements, violent extremism and terrorism are global realities that threaten well-being everywhere. Influencing these phenomena is one of the tasks of global education. As this is a global problem, efforts to resolve it are being made in international cooperation.

The Nordic Council of Ministers promotes a wide range of causes through joint Nordic action, including its programme for Democracy, Inclusion and Safety. Priority area 5 of the programme includes democratic competence. One of its operating forms is the DIS network, which is a common tool for preventing discrimination, exclusion and violent extremism and promoting children's and young people's democratic citizenship. The purpose of the network is to support the education sector's ability to address societal challenges and conflicts by democratic means and to prevent the development of violent extremist movements. The network also promotes discussion, exchanges of experiences and reciprocal development of expertise between the Nordic countries. As the network's name indicates, the Nordic position is that strengthening democratic inclusion is the key to preventing participation in extremist movements and violent extremism.

Violent radicalisation or extremism means that violence is used, threatened with, encouraged or legitimised on ideological grounds. Violent radicalisation may lead to joining a violent extremist group or activity and, in its most extreme form, to terrorist acts. While the threat of violent radicalisation and extremism in Finland remains low compared to many other countries, it has been increasing in recent years.

In 2017–2019, the DIS network organised two joint Nordic school projects aiming at the early prevention of violent extremism. In these projects, two teachers from three schools in each country received training at joint events, and a development project was set up in their schools. To support the projects, teaching material was translated into all Nordic languages. The materials include Finnish National Agency for Education's online publications *Kiistanalaisia aiheita opettamassa* (Finnish translation of a Council of Europe publication called *Living with Controversy: Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights*) and *Kiistoja hallinnoimassa* (Finnish translation of a Council of Europe publication called *Managing controversy: Developing a strategy for handling controversy and teaching controversial issues in schools*), as well as the Finnish version of the Norwegian DEMBRA website at <https://dembra.no/en/>. The Finnish National Agency for Education has also produced the publication *Constructive interaction*, which is available online at https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/constructive_interaction.pdf

The organisations coordinating EU actions for the prevention of violent extremism include the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). The RAN network's workshops bring together professionals of different fields involved in practical-level work to consider prevention

methods. The working groups include representatives from the police, prison service, educational administration, youth services, health services and local government. The network meetings produce recommendations and good practices related to different topics for the RAN website. For the RAN Network, visit https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en. Good practices related to the education sector can be found, among other things, in the document Transforming schools into labs for democracy https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-edu/docs/ran_edu_transforming_schools_into_labs_for_democracy_2018_en.pdf.

Extremist movements, violent extremism and terrorism are global problems. UNESCO has also produced material for schools and teachers. These materials can be found at <https://en.unesco.org/preventing-violent-extremism/education>. The Finnish National Agency for Education's publication Constructive interaction contains a translation of the booklet 'A Teacher's guide on the prevention of violent extremism' <https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/constructive-interaction>. Democratic global citizenship and the broad Global Citizenship Education (GCED) programme developed to support it also have a prominent role in UNESCO's materials.

The fruits of international cooperation have also been utilised in Finland's national efforts to prevent violent extremism. Finland has often also developed and pioneered good practices. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the national coordination of this work. The actions of the various administrative sectors are set out in the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism and specified in its implementation plan. The plans, and other materials related to them, can be found on the Ministry of the Interior's website at <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/75040>.

The best way to combat violent radicalisation and extremism is preventive work which promotes people's safety and sense of security as well as reduces confrontations between different population groups and the polarisation of society. The National Action Plan is targeted at groups and individuals at risk of being radicalised. The aim is to ensure that capabilities and permanent structures for preventing violent radicalisation and extremism are in place everywhere in Finland. Competence and proven practices must be easily accessible to everyone. A particular aim of the Action Plan is enhancing children's and young people's ability to recognise and protect themselves against messages and influence inciting violence.

The most recent Action Plan for 2019–2023 also imposes obligations on the education sector. In addition to the measures assigned specifically to it, its involvement is required in many other measures. Measures relevant to educational institutions include Anchor activities and directing young people to them, measures aiming to promote young people's participation in the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation, identification and prevention of attempts to recruit young people to the activities of violent extremist groups, and tackling terrorist propaganda and hate speech. The education sector is responsible for building up the teaching and early childhood education personnel's basic knowledge through staff training as well as increasing different types of cooperation and information exchanges.

The National Action Plan is binding at the ministerial level, in other words for the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Most of its measures are implemented in education and early childhood education and care as normal educational work following the curricula.

National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019–2023

The National Action Plan coordinates measures aiming to prevent extremism at the ministerial level and determines the actions to be taken in different administrative sectors. The programme has seven general objectives:

1. Reducing extremist violence and its threat.
2. Promoting the realisation of equality, freedom of expression and other constitutional rights.
3. Ensuring that national and local structures and procedures based on multi-professional cooperation are in place, making it possible for the authorities, organisations and communities to prevent violent radicalisation and extremism.
4. Effectively uncovering and investigating hate crimes, including punishable hate speech that meets the characteristics of an offence. Preventing speech that violates human dignity prohibited under the Non-Discrimination Act and harassment prohibited under the Act on Equality between Women and Men. Supporting victims and identifying the effects of hate crime and unlawful speech and harassment on the victim's reference group.
5. Reducing the impacts of violent extremism on local communities and environments.
6. Ensuring that people living in Finland, especially young people, find influencing society and decision-making by legal means effective and meaningful and that the worldviews and activities of violent extremist movements are not an attractive option.
7. Advancing the authorities' and NGOs' knowledge and competence related to preventing violent extremism.

The new Action Plan was produced in broad-based cooperation with different parties. The section on the education sector was produced by the Finnish National Agency for Education together with researchers at the University of Helsinki. The main focus in the education sector is on staff training, raising awareness among teachers and improving capabilities. To support these efforts, this publication contains the REDI model, which sets out educators' different tasks related to prevention.

In addition, the Action Plan names educational institutions and teachers as designated partners in several actions, including strengthening children's and young people's resilience by utilising Nordic and Council of Europe materials (Dembra, MiSi, Free to speak – safe to learn) and local Anchor activities. The Anchor activities are a point of contact with which other authorities, actors and citizens can get in touch when they have concerns over violently radicalised individuals or families. Involving young people in planning and carrying out the preventive work, for example by developing democracy education, is important. The aim is that professionals have sufficient knowledge of the insignia and symbols of extremist groups and are able to identify them. This enables the professionals to have discussions, especially with young people, about activities with which these symbols and insignia are associated and which put safety, well-being and social peace at risk. Improving media literacy plays an important role.

REDI - THE DIMENSIONS OF ADDRESSING, PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT RADICALISATION AND EXTREMISM IN EDUCATION

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Violent radicalisation and extremism and the roles assigned to educational institutions in public debate

International discussion on educational institutions' roles in preventing violent radicalisation and extremism has for long been dominated by openings focused on how educational institutions could detect and identify individuals who are at risk of, or have already undergone, violent radicalisation. As a result, the big picture of the work carried out in educational institutions has remained fragmented and incomplete in many areas. Little or no attention has been paid to acknowledging and reflecting on educators' personal preconceptions and existing knowledge, in particular, as well as to how difficult discussion topics, including those related to terrorism, can be dealt with in a pedagogically and ethically appropriate manner in educational institution contexts.

Why can educational institutions not be profilers?

The pressure to recognise violent radicalisation and extremism, or attempts to create profiles for or anticipate susceptibility to or risk of violent radicalisation, is problematic in many ways. A key reason for this is that it has not been possible to draw up a list based on research evidence of features or characteristics that would reliably anticipate an individual's or community's risk or likelihood of adopting and acting on the principles of a violent ideology. On the other hand, research has found that the development paths of violent radicalisation are individual and the sum of several multidimensional determinants.

Many undesirable consequences have been reported in countries where educators have been trained to identify potential signs of violent radicalisation in their learners. For example, it has been found that the pupils' freedom of expression has been restricted, and the threshold for expressing views critical of society has been made higher by fears that educators, fulfilling their official duty, will report opinions and attitudes that deviate from the mainstream to other authorities. The monitoring of characteristics associated with violent radicalisation has also been found to exacerbate harmful prejudices against social minorities.

Action plans based on profiling learners are not appropriate for or compatible with the Finnish school system. Rather than developing separate prevention and identification strategies, we should primarily understand how we can prevent the polarisation of children's and young people's attitudes and increasing popularity of violent extremist ideologies in educational institutions through holistic methods based on the curriculum and existing structures in ways that strengthen each learner's inclusion, well-being and pluralistic thinking.

Violent attitudes at the centre

The prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism has also been increasingly discussed in the context of Finnish education. What exactly we should prevent in education has, however, remained vague. In particular, the idea of defining the values that learners are allowed to support is a challenging starting point in a free, democratic society. So how could the boundary between acceptable but critical values and attitudes on the one hand, and inappropriate ones on the other, be defined in the context of educational institutions? How exactly are violent radicalisation and extremism defined, and what types of manifestations can they have in educational institution contexts? What exactly do we mean by prevention?

As a response to these challenges we have, in cooperation with Satu Lidman, a researcher of violence, and the Finnish National Agency for Education developed the concept of *'violent attitudes'* which refers to *'all values, beliefs and intentions that conflict with fundamental rights and curricula and which may lead to violent discourse and/or acts'*. Behaviour is guided by attitudes, which are composed of emotions and situational assessment. Violent attitudes are those which subject other people to hatred, exclusion and valuation. Violent attitudes include accepting the use of physical, mental, sexual or economic violence against the person or group that is the object of the hatred and/or for the purpose of promoting an objective associated with the person's own community or values. Such attitudes may be directly based on an ideology or value system, but they can also be learned or adopted without conscious reflection.

Attitudes are something that we can consciously discuss, question, and attempt to modify at different levels of education. It is thus essential in education to examine how issues are brought up, what ideas are based on, and what types of values underpin them. Education can influence attitudes by building up learners' knowledge, skills and experiences, thus reinforcing their evolving understanding of a pluralistic world and their personal worldviews.

REDI – model for supporting resilience, democracy and dialogue against violent radicalisation and extremism in educational institutions

For the part of the education sector, the Ministry of the Interior's National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019–2023 focuses on the REDI model developed by us, which describes the most important measures, actors and targets related to addressing, preventing and countering violent radicalisation and extremism in each dimension. In this context, the area marked in green is considered to cover the main dimensions of educators' work, as dimensions 0, 1a and 1b are part of the basic work of each educator, and the knowledge and skills objectives described in them are interlinked with daily teaching and educational activities with children and young people. The key point of the model is the observation that the objectives of dimensions 1a and 1b target the entire cohort of learners the educators meet in their work.

While the number of learners drops significantly after dimension 1b, the number of multiprofessional actors around the learner increases. In situations involving direct security threats and potential violent radicalisation, in dimensions 3 and 4 we can assume that the

measures only target an individual learner, who should be surrounded by a multidisciplinary group of experts. It is thus essential to note that rather than struggling alone with situations giving rise to concern, the educator should consult the principal, the school welfare group and other social welfare and health care actors about the matter. If necessary, the police can also be involved, as well as the multidisciplinary Anchor groups coordinated by the police in several localities.

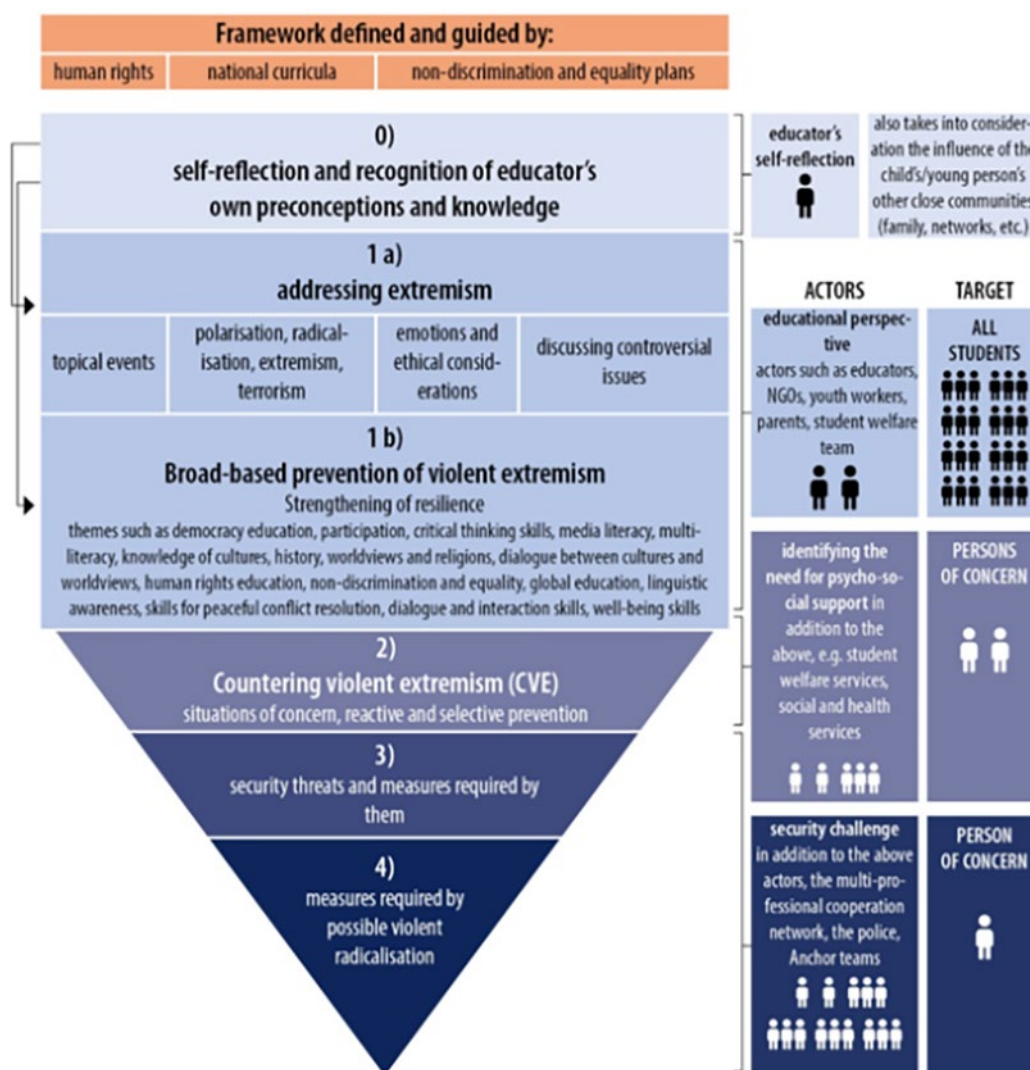


FIGURE 1. REDI-MODEL FOR SUPPORTING RESILIENCE, DEMOCRACY AND DIALOGUE AGAINST VIOLENT RADICALIZATION AND EXTREMISM IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (VALLINKOSKI, KOIRIKIVI & BENJAMIN 2019)

Dimension 0: Self reflection and recognition of educator's own preconceptions and knowledge

The REDI model starts with dimension 0, which lays the foundation for all of the following dimensions. For those working in education, recognising their own preconceived ideas and existing knowledge, reflection, and building up their knowledge are essential stages when planning and carrying out preventive work. Going through level 0 is important, as by working

on their own mindset, educators develop the ethical skills and knowledge they need to discuss and deal with the themes of violent radicalisation, extremism and terrorism with the learners.

In the reflection phase, self-reflection is essential, or awareness and critical examination of your personal values and attitudes as well as recognising and reflecting on your *intuitive responses*, which are automatic reactions associated with violent extremist ideologies and activities in your mind. In this context, *intuitive responses* refer to general attitudes and prejudices associated with violent radicalisation, extremism and terrorism in your mind. In the worst case, unconscious *intuitive responses* may feed social polarisation and create harmful images, for example of different social, cultural or religious groups, in situations where the class is discussing a recent terrorist attack or societal phenomena in a broader sense.

In terms of building up knowledge related to these phenomena, the acquisition of truthful and objective information and reflection are at the centre. While the aim of building up knowledge is to develop the educator's capabilities for discussing and encountering themes related to violent radicalisation, extremism and terrorism, we should acknowledge that it is rarely possible to present all-inclusive explanatory models or simple responses to difficult and multidimensional societal challenges. In other words, it is a good idea for the educator to prepare in advance for a feeling of uncertainty and for not always having answers to learners' questions or comments.

Dimension 1a: Addressing Extremism

In dimension 1a, polarisation and themes related to violent radicalisation, extremism and terrorism are addressed with learners. Current events, such as national and international crises, conflicts and terrorist attacks, make their way into learners' lives through news and media. When a school shooting or a terrorist attack takes place near or far, children and young people need support in processing their questions, feelings and thoughts related to it.

When dealing with shocking events caused by humans or controversial themes (ones that divide opinions and evoke strong emotions) with learners, it is important for educators to ensure that their actions do not support incorrect images, or reinforce stereotypes or threat scenarios. In this approach, the importance of self-reflection described at level 0 is highlighted. In these situations, time and space must be given for the learners to talk about their worries, but the discussion should not be allowed to stagnate at this phase. It is essential to address the topic in an age-appropriate and pedagogically relevant manner, to keep to the facts and to highlight different perspectives on the phenomenon being discussed. It is also important to try and steer the discussion into a direction where coping together, effective structures, togetherness and the need to at all times find an alternative to violence are at the centre.

If children and young people do not receive support and space for dealing with their questions, feelings and thoughts related to such events as recent terrorist attacks, they may be left with no means of dealing with difficult themes in a safe environment. In this case, there is also a risk that children and young people will go and discuss these topics in forums where simplified answers and solutions are offered to complex phenomena and where the justifications of these views may be considerably biased.

On the other hand, children and young people are also interested in the actual phenomena: what is violent radicalisation about, what is terrorism, who becomes radicalised, what motivates them, how could violent acts be prevented, am I at risk, and could the same thing happen here? Dealing with these questions, thoughts and feelings requires well-prepared educators who themselves understand the main features of the phenomenon and can tell ideologically justified violence apart from other forms of violence.

Dealing with topical phenomena requires capabilities consisting of knowledge, skills and concepts. Developing these capabilities allows learners to reflect on, recognise and understand factors affecting their own worldviews and identities and the phenomena of society around them as well as learn to participate in constructive societal debate and operate as active members of a democratic society.

Dimension 1b: Broad-based Prevention of Violent Extremism

Contents, methods and objectives related to broad-based prevention are already an essential part of the education sector's activities today, and they are based on national and international plans, documents and legislation that direct teaching and education (for example, see the Constitution of Finland, the National core curricula and UN Conventions). However, their effectiveness can be further strengthened by means of basic and in-service training provided for education sector actors and by developing the operational and discussion culture of educational institutions.

The main emphasis in the prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism in the context of an educational institution is primarily on knowledge, skills and social experiences accumulated through education as well as developing and paying attention to critical and reflective thinking. Reinforcing positive attitudes, capabilities and operating models that support diversity and social cohesion must be at the centre of the prevention work.

A key part of dimension 1b, or extensive preventive activities in educational institutions, is creating operating models and a school culture that consciously support each child's and young person's inclusion, well-being and positive attachment to society. Studies indicate that positive interpersonal relationships, a sense of belonging, and self-regulation skills (emotional skills) strengthen an individual's psychological resilience, in other words endurance and ability to preserve their functional capacity in difficult or stressful situations.

In the context of preventing violent radicalisation and extremism, it is also particularly important to support the individual's capabilities for independent thinking. Critical thinking, multiliteracy and media literacy skills strengthen the individual's capability for independent thinking and help them guard against external influence, group pressure and extremist propaganda.

The skills and knowledge connected to dimension 1b not only strengthen learners' and educational institutions' resilience but also respond to our ideas of the types of knowledge and skills needed for operation and general welfare in a democratic and pluralistic society of the 21st century.

Dimension 2: Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

In dimension 2, the work targets those learners whose thinking or actions are of concern for the educator, or whose appearance or behaviour shows worrying changes. For instance, this concern may be related to situations where the learner demonstrates a clear interest in violent ideology or operating models in their speech or behaviour.

While changes in behaviour or appearance, or rhetoric indicating extreme ideology, do not automatically mean that a child or young person is on the path to violent radicalisation, significant changes must always be taken seriously, as they are symptoms showing that the child's or young person's well-being may be at risk and they may need support. It is important to distinguish joking and deliberate provocation from actual extremism. In these situations, the educator's professional skills related to knowing the pupils, encountering learners and early intervention are at the centre. It is also essential to introduce and practise the use of democratic means of influence as an alternative to violent extremist movements and to harness the individual's resources for exerting influence in a manner that respects human rights and is non-violent. Taking these themes into account and guiding pupils towards active citizenship should thus be a key part of everyday teaching and education.

There may be a number of reasons behind changes that cause concern, which is why referring the learner to psychosocial support is essential. It is also vital to liaise with the guardians. Educators do not need an ability to know when the learner's behaviour is caused by possible violent radicalisation and when it is caused by some other phenomenon. A person of concern should be supported by personal guidance and monitoring which, in addition to the educator, are offered by such parties as school welfare actors at the educational institution and/or youth work, social and health care services and actors in various NGOs.

Dimension 3: Security threats and measures required by them; and

Dimension 4: Measures required by Possible Violent Radicalisation

In dimensions 3 and 4, the changes observed in the learner's behaviour or actions are so significant that they pose a direct threat to the school community's/society's sense of security or safety. The measures targeted at the individual in dimensions 3 and 4 are defined on a case-by-case basis, and in addition to the parties mentioned above, the multiprofessional cooperation network must also include the police and, for example, the local Anchor team.

It should be noted that the operating models of dimensions 2 to 4 are primarily directed and defined by any guidelines issued by and key actors operating in the municipality. In a situation where an educator suspects that a learner poses a threat to themselves or others, intervention is always required, and the educator must liaise with the other staff at the educational institution as well as the parties responsible for student welfare services, such as a school psychologist and/or a social worker. In an acute situation, the police should be contacted directly.

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“DID THAT TOUCH A SORE SPOT?!” – TEACHER’S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE AND DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCES

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The invention, development and current versatile coverage of vaccines have contributed to ensuring that children and young people are physically healthier and do not suffer from serious paediatric diseases as often as they did only fifty or a hundred years ago. We do not know what the world would be like today if vaccines had not been developed. Unfortunately, no vaccine has been invented to strengthen mental resilience and to protect us against unhealthy and harmful influences and ideas as well as to guarantee the individual’s capabilities for dealing with complex and controversial topics. The world is changing at such a tremendous pace that we cannot predict what it will be like here in fifty years’ time. At the moment, anyway, it appears that the world will not be getting any simpler. Consequently, active citizens of the future will need strong democratic competences and resilience to help them face the upheavals and changes of life and pressures exerted by other people, and to cope with the challenges and setbacks they will encounter.

In a changing and pluralistic world, the school cannot be an isolated, unchanging island, and the same applies to the teacher’s role. As societal discussion becomes polarised, the school could play an important role in building dialogue and understanding. The entire age group in Finland, including children from families with all types of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and worldviews, go through the comprehensive school system. While teaching the contents and skills of different subjects defined in the curriculum is typically seen as the core task of the school, we would like to challenge all teachers to also notice and use the opportunities for building dialogue between children and young people from different backgrounds as well as supporting the development of the pupils’ critical thinking and skills in justifying their views. Justifications for this can be found in the section on transversal skills in the curriculum: these skills should be part of all teaching and integrated into the school culture as a whole.

In this article, we discuss our thoughts about strengthening children’s and young people’s resilience and democratic competences in comprehensive school. We participated in the Nordic Council of Ministers’ pilot projects *Discussing Controversial Issues* and *democracy education project DEMBRA*. While the work in our school is only in its early stages, hopefully we are together headed towards the ideal described in this article.

Resilience and democratic competences from the school’s perspective

In the European Reference Framework of Competences, democratic competences are divided into four areas: values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding. The school’s role makes it easy to work on important skills and knowledge, including cooperation

skills, critical thinking, empathy, learning to learn, tolerance of ambiguity and critical examination of societal phenomena. These themes also receive a great deal of attention in the current curriculum.

While teachers may not consciously teach democratic competences, they model democratic values and attitudes by their own actions, such as responsibility, fairness, justice and respect for human rights. (Council of Europe, 2016.)

Resilience is a psychological characteristic; it resembles the immune system in that it is stronger in some people than in others. People with a high level of resilience can cope with life's difficulties better than others with a lower level. Rather than a permanent characteristic, resilience fortunately is a skill which can be practised and strengthened through positive actions aimed at maintaining functional capacity and supporting adaptation to life's challenges. (Finnish Association for Mental Health, 2019.)

We believe that developing and advancing democratic competences are part of resilience and therefore have an important role in school. Among other things, feelings of being included, noticed and accepted, interaction skills, courage to bring up difficult and perhaps controversial issues, respect for others and critical multiliteracy are aspects whose development the school can support. We believe that reinforcing resilience and democratic competences is a task that belongs to all teachers of all subjects in the school. We could ask if the word teacher is any longer relevant to describe the work we do, or if we should increasingly think of ourselves as educators whose task is to support the pupils holistically during their education path.

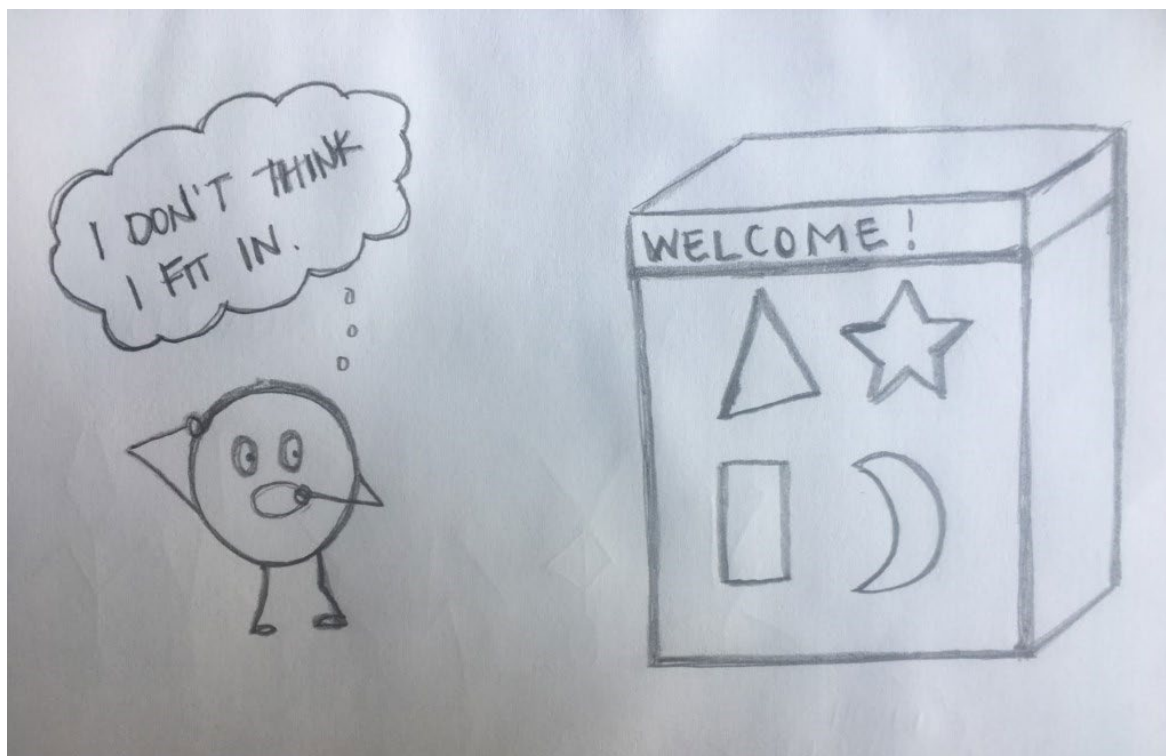
Diversity and fitting in a box – everyone has the right to feel accepted at school

"All teachers here hate us Muslims. They only like such pupils as A.A. and B.B."

The pupils who walk in through the school doors today are a more diverse group than ever before. There are pupils with an immigrant background, those from broken families, returnees, those who are depressed or uncertain about their sexuality or gender, pupils from socially excluded families, those who are shy or invisible, those who always get full marks, athletes, class clowns and everything in between. They must attend basic education – or at least complete their compulsory education – whether or not the pupil's role required by the school is a good fit for them. Trouble-free school attendance naturally requires some adaptation to norms, such as compliance with school rules and certain social skills. If the pupils who drag themselves in through the door every day feel that they are not accepted as themselves, something has gone wrong.

Attending school is tough if you feel every day that you are not a good fit or an outsider, especially when you should spare your energy for learning both academic and social skills. A feeling like this may arise from an extremely wide range of apparently minor interactive situations or the teacher's choice of words. When other pupils call you a 'fucking gay' in social situations, this does not encourage you to tell anyone about or be openly proud of your sexual orientation. A teacher's inapt choice of words during a lesson may exclude some of the group: 'You should all be brave enough to say what you think', or 'All Finnish people like

bathing in the sauna and eating salted liquorice and barbecued sausage', or 'What kind of guy are you supposed to be if you are not interested in ice hockey?' The sense of rejection may also arise from opinions you hear in society around you or in the media: 'The children of all unemployed people grow up to be losers who abuse the social welfare system!' or 'Everything goes wrong in the school because there are so many immigrants there and the teachers spend all their time teaching those pupils'. One of the strengths of the Finnish comprehensive school system is that it is equal and gives everyone the right to teaching and learning. This equality is something we should fight for tooth and nail. If a pupil feels they are an outsider in the school community, they may look for acceptance and a sense of belonging in groups and places that are unsafe.



As educators we should pay attention to our word choices and the images and texts we decide to use in teaching situations. However, situations where we intervene in inappropriate behaviour in the classroom or in a less formal situation are also significant. We should have the energy to intervene in insults the pupils target at each other under the guise of humour, because if we do not, they may think that we silently approve of this behaviour. Sometimes schools say they have no problems because 'we do not have immigrants' or 'our pupils are such a homogeneous group'; we find it difficult to believe, however, that there are schools in Finland where every pupil would feel fully accepted as themselves.

As society and the pupils change, this also influences the teacher's role and requires the teacher to change. At least the role should change, ensuring that all students could be encountered as themselves. An even greater change will be required before all pupils can acquire at school the skills they need and receive support for growing and developing into an active young person who can cope in a future of which we know nothing as yet.

Building interaction skills and democratic competences (path)

"Well, I told the pupils in 8 F that we are going to have a discussion today, because they keep telling me that we never do anything but follow the boring book. I gave them a topic and said they had two minutes to think about it, and then we would have a discussion. Of course, we had the typical two pupils who would have liked to talk all the time, but the others just sat there, stared at their phones or chatted about something else. When I tried to force them to speak, they just said 'I don't know', or 'I don't care'. They don't even know how to have a discussion. We got nowhere, so now we carry on studying the textbook!"

Sometimes even professional educators take certain skills for granted. They complain in the staff room that the pupils are unable to argue and defend their views and that they sit there listlessly, or else the entire discussion escalates almost into a fight when the pupils defend their views too fiercely. When teachers expect a high standard of interaction skills of their pupils without having spent time teaching them, it is like giving a child the last instruction page from a Lego kit and telling them to take the bits and build that spaceship.

Interaction skills and democratic competences are built up from pre-primary education on. As they attend a day-care centre, the children already practise listening to others, vote on whether their excursion should be headed to the park or the forest, and are guided to accept diversity. This process continues, or at least it should continue, throughout the education path, with the skills requirements and opportunities for exerting influence increasing as the pupils get older. As many opportunities as possible are created for the pupils to influence everyday matters that concern them. It is essential that the pupils can genuinely and authentically influence the issues being discussed, rather than being included just for the sake of it. For example, young pupils could suggest rewards their class will get for good behaviour and then vote on the suggestions, decide with whom they wish to do group work, or which game they will play as warm-up for the PE class. As their skills improve, the pupils increasingly participate in planning their learning as well as the school's practices together with adults. If the students' influence is limited to voting on the colour of the classroom curtains even in higher comprehensive school, the school has fallen for pseudo-democracy. If the pupils have practised using their democracy skills and expressing their opinions in small steps from the beginning, it is perfectly justified to expect that as teenagers they are able to comment on important issues of daily life, including the structure of the school day, course completion methods or the contents of multidisciplinary learning modules.

They should also start practising their discussion skills in pre-primary education. At first it may be difficult for them to say their opinions aloud. Allowing the pupils to practise expressing their opinions from the shelter of a role has been found a good practice, in which the pupils do not need to expose their personal opinions to other people's comments. They are encouraged to discuss and debate on age-appropriate themes, and it should be clear from the start that the end result is not forcing one person to change their opinion. What matters is learning to listen to what others say and trying to understand their viewpoints. The pupils must also learn to justify their opinions: a discussion based on 'because I just think that's the way it is' will not go very far. Listening to and understanding arguments and other viewpoints advances the pupils' understanding of how few things in the real world are so black and white that they can only be explained by a single extreme view. At the same time, interaction skills offer practice for critical thinking and multiliteracy.

Discussing controversial issues in class

An educator may find it difficult to talk about or start a discussion on controversial and difficult issues which evoke emotions. We all certainly have memories from our first school years of teachers who knew it all, but also of those who spouted their personal opinions as truths and painted a black-and-white picture of issues in which greyscale tones should also be allowed. In the role of a teacher, it may seem strange to admit that you do not know or are unsure about something, and going outside your comfort zone in a classroom situation can be frightening. However, educators often need no other tool except being genuinely present in the situation as their true selves and giving everyone the space to share their thoughts. The teacher will often not reveal their personal opinion on the discussion topic unless a pupil insists on it, and in these situations, they must be very careful. However, the teacher should also be prepared to admit that they do not know what to think about a controversial or complex issue, or that they do not have enough information to form an opinion.

The pupils' discussion openings on controversial and conflicting topics are often provocative. *'I'm a racist, my parents are racists, and my whole family are racists. Why the **** do I have to go to this school of liberals?'* The educator thus needs courage to tackle difficult and emotional issues. Sometimes the easiest thing would be to overrule a strong opinion or comment and say at once that 'you mustn't talk/think like that' and continue the lesson, but tackling topics and having factual discussions about them are important. Some of our pupils make such comments to test and provoke the educator, while some have no adult outside the school with whom they could discuss controversial issues, or any other subject, factually and confidentially. Consequently, when a pupil makes inappropriate comments about 'the fucking gays' or 'the fucking immigrants', it may mean that they are thinking about these themes and would like to discuss them with a safe adult. The challenge faced by the teacher in these situations is getting it across to the pupil that while they are accepted as a person in school, the way they expressed their opinion was offensive or discriminatory, and as such not suitable for the school environment. It has been found a good practice for the teacher to verbalise to the pupil one of their positive characteristics while intervening in the way they express themselves or their choice of words: 'I'm pleased that you have the courage to share your views with us. However, the way you expressed this opinion was really insulting. Could you explain in other words what you mean?' It is also always a good idea to ask in a neutrally interested tone about the reasons behind the pupil's opinion, without being provoked or apportioning blame. This means that the pupil can be encountered, while the teacher models a peaceful, democratic discussion and, if necessary, is able to correct the potentially incorrect information behind the opinions.

Suppressing discussion or failing to practise discussion skills may seem like easier options, but they may only reinforce the pupils' own perspectives on issues and create feelings of being rejected. Similarly, if no one questions their opinions or provides them with other perspectives, this may further reinforce the one-sided perception. The educator's task thus ultimately is to act as a type of prism in the classroom which reflects many different perspectives and alternative ideas, making the pupils see their actions in a different light. These perspectives and alternatives may wake one of them up to noticing that, rather than the future being predetermined or the options really narrow, there are many options and paths in the world to choose from. This is precisely why it is a great asset that Finnish comprehensive schools have not yet differentiated into popular schools and those to be avoided, and all schools have children from different backgrounds. The cohort of pupils is so

heterogeneous that, through dialogue with fellow pupils from different backgrounds and with the teacher's support, the pupils may be able to discover horizons, future paths and thought patterns they would not have found independently.

A chain reaction triggers the change

The daily life of a school is rather busy, among other things due to the increasing workload imposed on teachers, the challenges faced by the pupils, and continuous development work, and it appears that society constantly wishes to add a wide range of items to the school's task list. Strengthening democratic competences and resilience may thus often seem another additional new task that the school should be able to manage with limited resources. Sometimes the equation may seem unsolvable. We think that while everything does not need to change overnight, as long as everyone is aiming for the same goals, teachers will find their individual pathways. Some are already quite advanced, and for others, thinking about how they could tackle one of these topics even a few times during the school year is enough to trigger a radical change. The most important thing is for everyone to feel that our task in the school includes discussing challenging topics and helping pupils build their democratic competences within the scope of the possibilities offered by each teacher's subject and work.

Democratic competences or resilience cannot be built in a day, and measuring them is difficult. Every one of us may feel powerless at times when facing such big themes. In the following quote instructor Jussi Lehtonen, who works with undocumented actors, gives an apt summary of why we should continue this work: "Personally I believe there are stories that need to be told. It matters. If it changes something, even a single person's ideas, it can trigger a chain reaction." (HS 6 December)

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FEELING INCLUDED HELPS YOU FIND YOUR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY

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When the pupils at the school speak fifty different languages and their families come from all over the world, and when the pupils' personal experiences of school attendance and school culture are immeasurably diverse, careful consideration must be given to how each pupil could feel they are in the right place when they open the school door. How could the pupils be helped to experience that there is a place for them in the community? Through what kind of actions and structures can the school ensure different pupils' commitment to working together and adopting the identity of 'a pupil in our school' and thus their attachment to society as a whole?

In addition to being a teacher training school of the University of Turku, Turun normaalikoulu is also a multicultural school in a suburb of Turku. The school is located in Varissuo, a district where over 40% of the residents speak a language other than Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue, and approx. 65% of basic education pupils speak a home language other than Finnish (2019). The school consists of a lower and higher comprehensive school and a general upper secondary school. It also caters for the pupils of Turku International School. The pupils have as many perceptions of the world and religions, beliefs and worldviews as there are pairs of shoes in the school halls.

The pupils represent themselves

One of the most important principles in promoting the pupils' inclusion is that, while the school strives to give the pupils' diverse cultures and languages positive attention during the lessons and also at specific events, no pupil is labelled as a stereotype of their or their guardian's culture, and each pupil represents themselves and their own personality and subculture.

First of all, no culture is static and stable; instead, the concept of culture itself includes the idea of change, process and development (see e.g. Vahtikari 2013). All perceptions of a uniform Finnish, Arab, American or any other culture are thus assumptions and mental constructs which collapse when we take a closer look at the lives and activities of individuals or individual families. The pet idea of Snellman, a 19th-century Finnish statesman, of one language (and one mind) comes nowhere near to reflecting today's reality where families may use several languages and the child or young person have a native-level proficiency in all of them. On the other hand, the pupil may not always be able to write their parents' mother tongue.

Secondly, growing pupils who soak up influences at home, at school, in their growth environment – the multicultural district of Varissuo – and from each other, are often only seeking their identity between two and sometimes more cultures. Most of those pupils at our school whose home language is not Finnish have an immigrant background: while their

parents are immigrants, the children were born in Finland. Lotta Haikkola has studied the identities of young people with an immigrant background and argues that being a foreigner is often an important part of second-generation migrants' self-image, and they build their identity by distinguishing themselves from Finnishness and the negative features associated with it. This is often related to a development phase typical of young people, in which they wish to stand out from others when looking for their personal uniqueness (Lovio 2011). Fundamentally, the experience of inclusion stems from acceptance: the pupils can represent themselves at school and be whatever they wish to see in themselves. If a pupil is accepted as an individual at school, they never need to fit in with outsiders' – or even their own families' – perceptions of what should be part of their or their family's culture, allowing them to develop their own monocultural or multicultural identity in peace. This is also important for other minorities besides cultural or linguistic ones, including young people who identify with sexual minorities.

If a pupil is primarily seen as a representative of their culture and only in second place as an individual, there is a risk of forgetting the primary frame of reference of higher and to some extent also lower comprehensive school: puberty. Between the ages of 11 and 19, the pupil goes through a transition, which may sometimes be dramatic, from the prepubescent stage to puberty and the more serene stage of young adulthood. This stage in itself results in conflicts with adults, regardless of the young people's cultural backgrounds. Interpreting conflicts exclusively from the viewpoint of cultural background negates the young person's right to go through puberty like their peers. Applying the frame of reference of puberty to conflicts creates security for both teachers, who can then draw on their professional expertise in developmental psychology, and the young person, who can feel they are one individual among others at school. Understanding the cultural background that is significant for the pupil and giving positive visibility to pupils' diverse backgrounds at school and during the lessons naturally promotes a sense of inclusion.

Inclusion is based on interaction

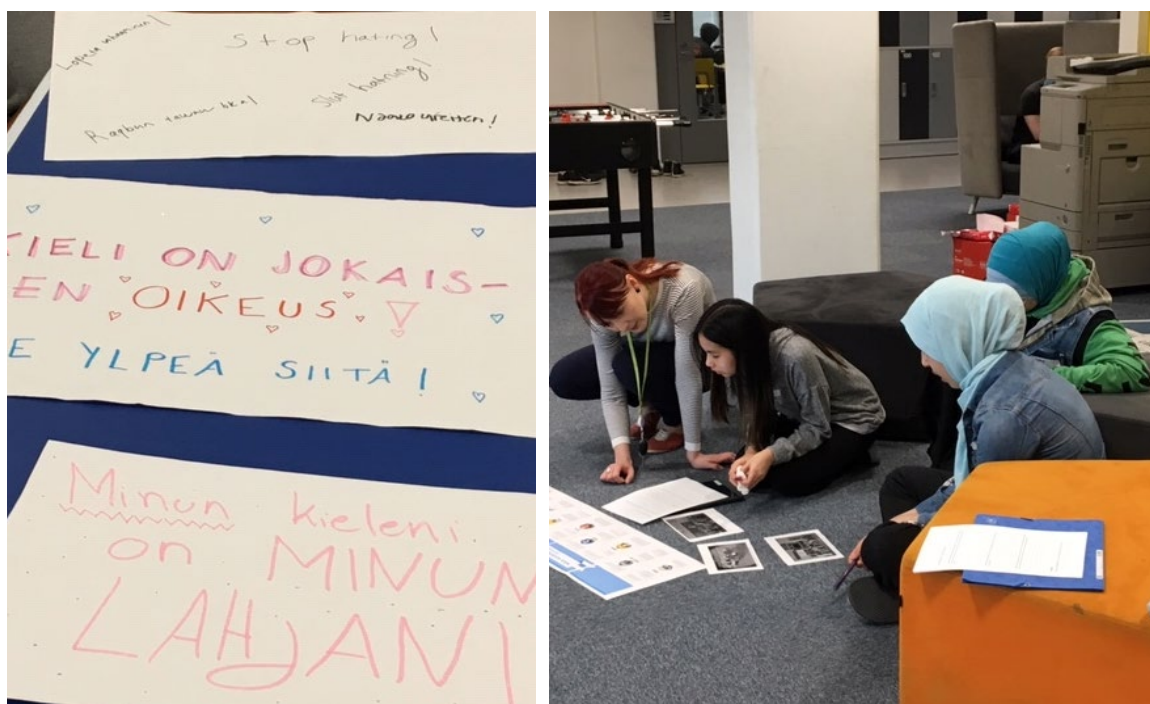
It is clear that in a school of many worldviews, a positive attitude is not always enough. Active measures are needed to enable children and young people to feel that their position in the community is secure and allow them to practise plotting a course in a world where extremist thinking and displaying open and hostile contempt towards people born with a different system of values is gaining ground.

The most important element shaping the school's atmosphere is constructive, open and respectful interaction between teachers and pupils. It is always also echoed in the relationships between the pupils. Rather than attempting to hide challenges, an atmosphere of this type deals with problems in a solution-oriented manner, in a constructive spirit, and with a view to the future. For the purposes of solving problems, bygones are allowed to be bygones, and the starting point is that the actions of all parties must enable peaceful cooperation in the future.

When problems between pupils crop up at Turun normaalikoulu, we spend a lot of time discussing how and under what conditions the pupils can work together, even if their views of each other were initially suspicious and even hostile. The pupils' concerns, for example those related to harassment or taunting, are taken seriously even if they appear small and

dealt with in a mediation discussion, allowing the parties to express their wishes concerning the terms on which they feel they could work together. An agreement is reached on the basis of these wishes, and the parties' ability to comply with the agreement is monitored. Rather than requiring the pupils to agree or be friends with everyone, the school expects that different people are able to work together for the common good. This is the basic principle of education underpinned by equality and respect for human rights. We talk with the pupils and also with the guardians a great deal about learning tolerance, as tolerance is the first step towards establishing dialogue and learning intercultural skills.

We also practise dialogue skills. This year, the school has organised dialogues based on Sitra's Timeout concept (Erätauko 2019) for teachers, trainee teachers and also pupils, who can later draw on the skills they have learned for organising and conducting dialogues.



The annual work plan of the higher comprehensive school includes a theme day on which controversial issues are discussed in class to provide the pupils with a safe channel for expressing their opinions that may differ from the mainstream. Both the teachers and trainees in charge of planning the theme day have received training in the methods of discussing controversial issues. A representative of the school participated in training for educators at a workshop organised by the European Wergeland Center in Utøya, and the Council of Europe publication *Living with Controversy: Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights* (2017) has also been helpful. On the theme day, a topic proposed by the pupils is discussed with a multidisciplinary approach. The specific transversal competence goal set for the discussion is L2, or intercultural interaction. The topics and methods vary from class to class. Last year, for example, the following topics which the pupils found in some way controversial were discussed: god vs. science, animal rights, human rights, child labour, sexual minorities, linguistic minorities, expression of emotions, equality, young people's rights and responsibilities, cannabis, discrimination, racism and mental health problems. Action-based and participatory teaching methods are favoured. Controversial topics evoke a wide range of emotions, and action, such as gaming or drama, enables the pupils to experience a variety of emotions and also put themselves in the role of the opposing party.

The special objective of the theme day is learning to listen as, when discussing controversial issues, it is important for the pupils to realise that there are no winners in a dialogue; in this respect, it differs from a debate, which often fuels controversy. Understanding this also makes life easier and creates a sense of security for the teacher and trainee teacher when they encounter a conflict during a lesson, which can sometimes provoke a heated debate on a controversial topic. It is enough to listen and give space to all opinions. The teacher does not have to compromise on laws or human rights or express a personal opinion. When the pupils listen to each other and learn that different views can be expressed at school, they also begin to understand the backgrounds of these views and learn both to provide and ask for justifications for different perceptions. This increases interaction between different groups and thus cohesion in the school. Experiences of the theme day's peaceful atmosphere encourage us to continue.

Involving guardians in school attendance

Natural and respectful interaction is also needed between guardians and the school. It is clear that the school and the guardians do not always see eye to eye on what is best for the pupil. Having constructive discussions is nevertheless possible. For example, the guardian has the right to make decisions about learning tests carried out on the pupil, while the school decides on the teaching arrangements. The explicit recognition of the guardian's rights defuses conflicts in situations where the views of the school and the guardian differ. Over the long term, the school benefits from the guardians maintaining their trust in the school's operation even if there are disagreements, as a trustful relationship ultimately benefits the pupil and makes it easier to deal with their issues.

A lot of consideration has been given to guardians' participation also in other respects. The school meets guardians frequently, and the threshold for meeting or contacting them is low – one of the advantages of being a local school is that almost all families live in the neighbourhood of the school. In addition to themed meetings and development discussions, we have tried to think of ways in which we could attract greater numbers of multicultural parents to parents' evenings. No involvement in school activities is required of the parents in many countries, and especially for immigrant parents, the way the Finnish school works may appear strange and difficult. Providing an interpreter at parents' evenings is not enough to guarantee a feeling of being included for the guardians. However, it obviously promotes the child's or young person's experienced inclusion if the guardians participate in the school attendance or even keep up with what the pupils are doing at school: when the parent knows what goes on at school and what kind of requirements, tasks or opportunities the pupil has, the guardian's possibilities of supporting the pupil are much better than if they were excluded from information and interaction. The simplest example of this is that the guardian knows about any exceptional activities at school and is able to prepare and equip the pupil for them.

Turun normaalikoulu has tried out slightly different meetings with parents to promote the guardians' and, consequently, also the pupils' inclusion. First of all, the guardians of next year's grade 7 pupils are invited to familiarise themselves with the school and its activities in the spring of grade 6. We find that guardians of higher comprehensive school pupils are less likely to participate in parents' evenings than in the lower comprehensive school. The reason for this may be that higher comprehensive school pupils are expected to be more independent and thus need less support from the guardian. In the spring, the parents' evening is organised around the same time as the grade 6 pupils come and visit the higher

comprehensive school. This helps both the guardians and the young people understand the higher comprehensive as a natural continuation for the lower comprehensive school. On the other hand, the young people are also invited to the first parents' evening for grade 7 to maintain a close connection between the school, the young people and the guardians. The participant numbers have indeed been clearly higher than in previous years. Rather than parents' evenings, joint evenings for guardians and young people have also been organised in the autumn of grades 8 and 9. At these events, the young people and their guardians have together visited different information points and action stations focusing on such themes as well-being and further studies. It appears that this method makes the school a common project for the guardian and the young person.

In particular, efforts are made to promote the inclusion of immigrant parents by organising multilingual parents' evenings at which teachers of pupils' mother tongues provide information on the school's key pedagogical operating models or legislation in the parents' languages. For example, a multilingual parents' evening on the subject of the three-tiered support system was highly popular. The school's special needs teachers had prepared the material, which all groups discussed in their own languages. As mother tongue teachers from a neighbouring school also came along, a total of six language groups in addition to the Finnish group were provided. During the evening, a number of other questions important for the guardians were also raised. They were noted down for use at later events. Another form of meeting parents is 'a lesson in the language of the school' organised during the open day. At these lessons, the guardians can complete assignments with different themes in a variety of languages and thus familiarise themselves with pupil assessment, teaching methods, school administration and so on.

The guardians' involvement in and knowledge of the school's activities can be increased by means of small actions for welcoming the guardian to participate in school life, whatever their background and ideology. When the guardians feel welcome, this is reflected on the children and young people. Despite this, the guardians of each new pupil are also told explicitly that the school would like them to participate in the pupil's school attendance in any way that is possible for them. Direct communication reduces misunderstandings and prejudices. At school events, it is also possible for guardians to meet each other.

Pupils take charge of their learning

Pupils are encouraged to participate in planning and assessing their learning. Under an agreement made with the teachers and recorded in the school's common practices, at the beginning of learning units (such as themes), the teachers and pupils plan together what will be assessed and how during the unit, and how each assessment will be emphasised. A forward-looking assessment discussion is conducted with basic education pupils when they are roughly half way through the year's syllabus. This enables the pupils to influence their success and determine their target level, should they wish to do so. This is highly important in terms of school motivation and the pupils' ambition to make progress.

Lessons are strongly differentiated, which means that the pupils can participate in the teaching at their own level of learning and language proficiency. Co-teaching, which enables flexible groupings, is used increasingly. This encourages all pupils, both fast and slower learners. Some of the lessons are held for the entire class group, however, to prevent the

differences between the sub-groups from becoming too great. The lessons of the various parallel classes in the same grade are placed in the same time slot in the timetable, which facilitates co-teaching and differentiation as well as effective help provided by a special needs teacher. This, on the other hand, makes it possible for pupils who need linguistic support, for example, to mostly study with their class, rather than separating them from the others. The entire school is committed to improving literacy, for example through agreeing on a daily reading siesta; this means that all higher comprehensive pupils spend fifteen minutes reading a book of their own choosing. A multicultural school's efforts to promote inclusion are supported by the fact that basic education teachers have received systematic and goal-oriented training in language-aware teaching.

Extensive special needs education in small groups is naturally also available for pupils who need support. Teachers of the pupils' mother tongues provide remedial teaching in small groups or participate in classroom teaching. Homework clubs operate in the lower comprehensive school, and reprimands in the Wilma system are prevented in the higher comprehensive school by providing a reading room led by a special needs teacher every morning for those who have forgotten to do their homework. All of this is an essential part of organising school work so that we can reinforce each pupil's self-esteem as learners and ensure that even pupils whose academic performance is poor do not feel excluded. School is for everyone, including different learners and those whose Finnish language is still developing, or whose parents cannot help them with homework because they are illiterate. In order to guarantee equality, the school also made a decision years ago to offer all pupils from lower comprehensive to general upper secondary school a personal computer or tablet.

The households in Varissuo have some of the lowest incomes in Turku, and for this reason, upper secondary school students have the opportunity to stay in school to do their homework in the evenings, as all pupils do not have a peaceful corner at home in which to focus on school work. An effort is also made to organise various clubs to give as many pupils as possible an opportunity to engage in recreational activities without costs. Recreational and other activities are organised in cooperation with associations in the area, such as the Girls' House and the ethnic associations. Such activities as the weekly afternoon tea for girls is for many pupils a pleasant way of meeting their peers also after school before they go home. The pupils' inclusion can be supported in many different ways through the school's value choices, of which creating opportunities for participation in recreational activities is a specific example.

The youth club close by the school and its employees have also been good partners for the school. In cooperation with them, we organise a youth club recess a few times a week for different groups, for instance girls or grade 7 pupils. During this recess, youth workers chat with the young people and introduce them to the youth club's activities. In a participatory budgeting project, the pupils have had the opportunity to propose new activities for the youth club and then vote on the activities to be carried out. This gives them a personal introduction to participation in society and exerting influence. Student councils naturally also operate at different levels of the school and, for example, comment on school rules, make initiatives, actively organise communal or thematic activities for the pupils, such as promoting sustainable development, and regularly hold the Principal's Question Time. The pupils also participate in the recruitment of new teachers: even special needs teachers were first vetted by the pupils.

Preventive cooperation with the authorities

Regular cooperation with other authorities in the area significantly supports the efforts to prevent exclusion and strengthen inclusion. The award-winning neighbourhood police scheme of Varissuo, which is also well known nationally, has for years supported the education provided by the school even if, of course, the police also investigate criminal offences where necessary. When this method is used for strictly pedagogical purposes, educational discussions with the police have been found a very effective way of bringing a young person back to the straight and narrow. The objective is to guide the young person in the right direction in good time before they reach the age of actual criminal liability at 15. In cooperation between the authorities, the main emphasis should thus be on preventing exclusion and the escalation of potential problems. It is important that such authorities as the police or the educational administration are seen as a constructive and reliable partner, as the authorities' activities are a window into the Finnish democracy.

Inclusion is part of the school culture, not a project. When a pupil participates in learning and other activities in the school community as well as outside school together with others, and when the guardians can be persuaded to believe that the school works together with them, in the interest of their child and applying its best expertise, and that the entire staff pulls in the same direction, we can say that the school is exactly the right place for each pupil attending it. A positive experience of everyone's participation at school will later foster a constructive attitude towards other forms of civic activity that will also support the pupil in later life.

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CAUGHT IN THE TURBULENCE OF ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNING

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Kello School in Oulu has been active in UNESCO's ASPnet school network since 2007. This status obliges the school to base its teaching on diverse Finnish cultural heritage and promote interest in other cultures as well as reinforce respect for cultural diversity and interaction within and between cultures, thus laying a foundation for culturally sustainable development. People from different cultural and language backgrounds have been meeting our pupils and each other in our school for years. The pupils and the staff have had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the customs, communal practices and worldviews of many different cultures and to improve their competence in foreign languages.

The curriculum also includes transversal learning units. Kello School implements section L2 of the National core curriculum (cultural competence, interaction and expression). Among other things, this section defines global education at the school level. The task of global education is to open people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world and awaken them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all (Maastricht Declaration 2002). Global education emphasises the ethics of a global citizen, acknowledging the limitations of Earth's resources and the skills to act wisely and responsibly in globalised operating environments. The UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1974 has had a particular impact on the underpinning values of global education.

At Kello School, the principles discussed above have found a concrete expression in many ways. At the higher comprehensive school, the pupils can choose a global education course. The school regularly hosts visitors from many countries arriving through the University of Oulu. In connection with the transversal studies of the curriculum, Erasmus students from the University regularly visit the global education course. For three years, trainee teachers from the Spanish University of Granada have come to our school under the Erasmus + programme.

Through the AIESEC's H.E.R.O project, we have hosted visits of young students from different countries. This organisation has a programme based on anti-bullying lessons, during which the students have also told the pupils about the languages and cultures of their countries. The second student teacher to arrive through the Japanese EuroAsia 2 programme will come to our school in spring 2020.

A large number of asylum seekers came to Finland in 2015. In Oulu, they were placed in two reception centres. The Finnish Red Cross launched integration activities in Oulu in 2016, and the Salama team was established as part of them. The Finnish Red Cross chose asylum seekers willing to participate in the Salama project and trained them to introduce themselves and spread information about their home countries and cultures in Finnish society, thus promoting their integration in our country. In autumn 2016, the teacher of our

global education course told the Finnish Red Cross that representatives of the Salama team would be welcome at Kello School. These visits in 2016 and 2017 gave the pupils of our school an excellent idea of what it is like to be a refugee and provided them with information about the asylum seekers' home countries and their cultures. The visits were highly successful. The guardians had been informed of them in advance – as they are of all global education activities. In articles about the Salama team activities published in local newspapers, the pupils who were interviewed gave positive feedback on the visits and explained how getting to know asylum seekers increased their knowledge of these people and uprooted prejudices. The pupils experienced the activities as a refreshing part of the school's daily life. Based on the example provided by Kello School, some other schools in Oulu and Oulu subregion also launched cooperation with the Finnish Red Cross.

After the articles came out, however, pieces which maligned the Salama team's work based on false information began to systematically appear in some publications. Very aggressive and tendentious messages were received from some guardians. The messages suggested that the asylum seekers intended to get to know pupils at the schools for purposes of sexual exploitation and demanded that the activities should be stopped. In particular, the teacher of the global education course was subjected to verbal abuse on the social media. These activities became so blatant that the teacher had to change their phone number and keep their address secret. I also received inappropriate messages and telephone calls in my role as the principal. The teachers and I tried to correct the false claims, but some people were unwilling to accept the facts. It was like fighting windmills. The heading of one article was: "Children and young people groomed in Oulu, immigrants' Salama team orchestrated by the Finnish Red Cross hangs around Kello School" (MV-lehti). Our impression was that these activities were well-organised and intentionally misleading.

At the same time, a handful of highly regrettable cases were uncovered in Oulu, in which a few young girls were victims of exploitation, and it turned out that the suspects were asylum seekers. While the suspects' names were not published, the assertion that they were the very same asylum seekers who had visited Kello School was spread as a certain fact. This naturally was untrue.

In December 2018, a political party represented in the local council submitted a question to the City Council about the school visits of asylum seekers and quota refugees and the teaching arrangements. On 18 December 2018, an individual council member additionally submitted a question to the Council about immigrants' visits to schools and day-care centres. It was worded as follows: "Who made this idiotic decision to bring migrants (without background checks) to our children's SCHOOLS and even DAY-CARE CENTRES. I want to know who is responsible for these crimes" (extract from the minutes of Oulu City Council's Question Time, December 2018). The questions were answered by the City's Director of Education and Cultural Services. Before answering, they had asked for background information on the topic from Kello School, among others.

A lively debate on this matter ensued in the city council. It is worth noting that local councillors in many parties believed the misinformation. Speakers at the council meeting, including some who had a background in teaching, called for a ban on asylum seekers' visits to the city's institutions. The Mayor of Oulu stated in public that the aim was to avoid creating tensions between different population groups and to involve NGOs operating in Oulu in planning efforts. According to the Mayor, the Rector of the University of Oulu had said that the university was interested in participating in such planning or content development activities.

After the first cases of exploitation became public, under obvious pressure the Director of Education and Cultural Services had to instruct the city's schools and day-care centres to suspend the Salama team's visits. The instruction naturally raised questions, also among members of the City of Oulu's Education and Culture Committee, about whether this added up to discriminating against and stigmatising a certain population group in general.

The instructions issued by the Director of Education and Cultural Services had their consequences, however, and they were used to fuel conflicts between asylum seekers and other citizens and, in a way, legitimise inflammatory actions.

In February 2019, young Finnish athletes and artists arrived at Kello School for a Kytke Workshop organised by the Walter association, which is funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. All these visitors were Finnish citizens with different ethnic backgrounds. The purpose of the workshops was to promote intercultural interaction, respect for other people and taking responsibility, all directly relevant to curriculum contents.

As parliamentary elections were held in Finland in April 2019, one candidate saw this as an excellent weapon for their election campaign. They asked me if asylum seekers had visited our school as, according to them, they had been contacted by concerned residents. I answered truthfully that there had been no such visits. As a result of the outrage associated with the asylum seekers' visits, the Finnish Red Cross had suspended the Salama team's activities. Rather than accepting my answer, the candidate said that none of the people who had got in touch had so far been untruthful, and they did not understand why so many residents had contacted them. I had to tell them that the information they had received in this case was false. They were not satisfied with the facts, which apparently did not fit in with their political agenda, however. For example, the candidate started a Facebook campaign in which Kello School was in the line of fire. Among other things, the candidate used the following expressions: "Shocking experiences reported by young people. Have students in Oulu come across ideological brainwashing in other schools besides Kello?" It should be noted that the candidate in question, who is a student teacher, describes activities based on the curriculum as brainwashing.

In connection with the Salama team's visits, we had asked the pupils about their opinions of the activities. The feedback was unambiguously positive, and it showed that the team's activities had removed many suspicions and racist attitudes.

In a Facebook group called Oulun Puskaradio ('Oulu Grapevine'), the election candidate soon found supporters. The group started systematically spreading misinformation about our school and its global education work. I was personally threatened, and some posters said they wished that my family members would be targeted by violence. When reading such messages, it was impossible to avoid thinking that they were the product of a troll factory. They deliberately disseminated false information which, as it were, took on a life of its own, and there no longer was any place for facts in that communication.

The case was turned into a narrative based on misinformation, and false claims became facts which the posters choose to trust, using their misguided ideas to continue the story. When an opinion or false information is repeated as a truth, a fantasy based on a misconception may be transformed into and start looking like a factual statement. This way, the original issue is quite forgotten and the posters create a new narrative of their own, promoting their personal goals and seeking to gain the voters' confidence.

Among other things, posts claiming that men with an immigrant background have persuaded girls to get into their cars in the area of Kello School appeared in the social media. One message, for example, continued like this: "Though I'm not sure if it was in Kello, it could have been somewhere else." As I felt that the Facebook posts met the criteria of a criminal offence, I reported them to the police. After investigating the matter, the police did not take it further. They justified this decision by stating that there was no reason to suspect an offence and that the foundations of Western society include freedom of expression. However, the police believed that these activities may have been a breach of good manners.

The Finnish Broadcasting Company's local radio station disseminated fact-based information about Walter association's Kytke workshops. I was interviewed on the radio, and an article on this issue was published on YLE Oulu's Facebook page. As reporting based on correct information did not fit in with certain persons' agenda and failed to promote their election campaign, the result was another slandering campaign based on misinformation, including on Facebook. The parliamentary election candidate, who had contacted me after the visit of the Walter association's representatives, was particularly active in this campaign. In my opinion, their posts took on demagogic characteristics, and they deliberately sought to create conflicts and polarisation between different groups. The posts gave the impression that no visitors to schools should be accepted other than Finnish citizens, and of these only ones with a light skin colour. This candidate was elected to Finnish Parliament with a great number of votes.

When you analyse these events, it is worrying that misconceptions and false information are used as weapons in an electoral campaign, and that distorted information is used to attack the institutions of our democratic society, in other words democracy itself. Stigmatising a certain group of people, limiting their rights and perhaps even questioning their human dignity contradicts the ethical perceptions of Finnish society based on equality.

CONSTRUCTIVE INTERACTION IN DAILY SCHOOL LIFE

Minna Törrönen

Tampere University Teacher Training School

Tampereen normaalikoulu, the teacher training school of the University of Tampere, had an opportunity to participate in the Nordic Wergeland Center's training on controversial topics and constructive interaction in Utøya. The principal and two teachers who had participated in the training shared their skills with all higher comprehensive school teachers at an action-based teachers' meeting, and everyone got to familiarise themselves with the methods of constructive interaction in practice.

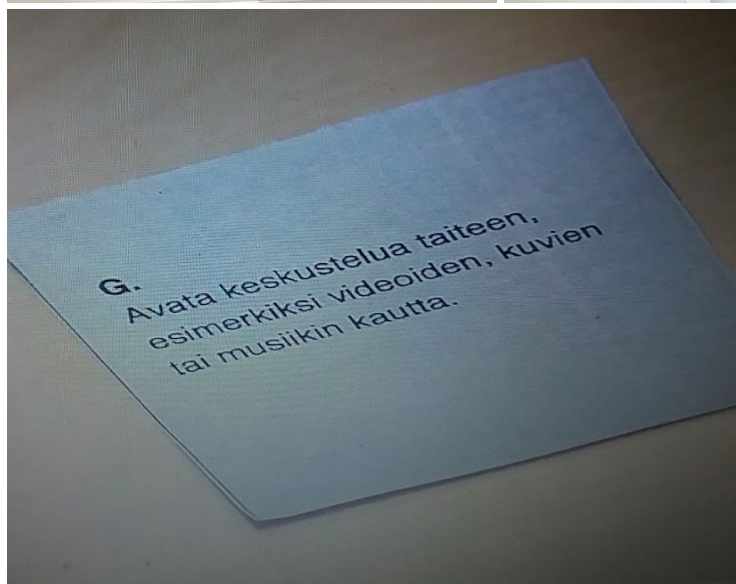
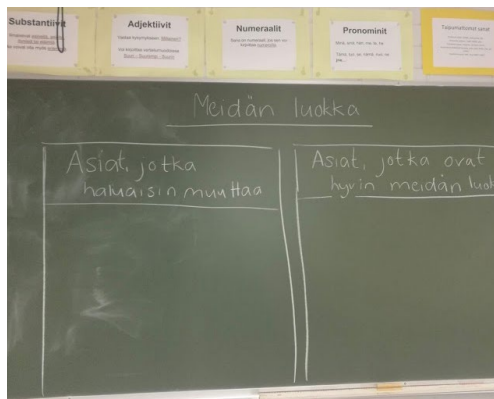
A second training session on these methods was organised for those higher comprehensive school teachers who were interested. As a teacher education institution, Tampereen normaalikoulu has also organised group training for student subject teachers on this operating model and methods. Higher comprehensive school teachers and student teachers organised a theme day on which each higher comprehensive teacher and pupil had an opportunity to practise talking about controversial issues and engaging in constructive interaction. Rather than organising an individual day, what really matters is incorporating constructive interaction in the daily life of the school, regardless of the subject the teacher or trainee teaches. Constructive interaction and exercises related to it increase capabilities for listening and effective interaction. The discussion topics arise from the pupils' and students' daily lives and society.

Pupils and students, teachers and trainees alike have found the methods of constructive interaction a meaningful and inspiring practice. Being heard and seen and belonging to a community is a basic human need. The teachers have noticed that the pupils and students need and want to discuss controversial issues and influence learning content and methods. The teachers have been willing and prepared to try different methods. Many teachers have already had tools for constructive discussion and positive interaction. Five teachers of our school have also pursued studies in positive learning and life skills for about a year and shared their competence at workshops aimed for the staff, class teachers and subject teachers. Positive pedagogy is an integral part of maintaining and promoting constructive interaction.

Higher comprehensive school is the last opportunity to reach the entire age group, which is why all grade 7 pupils in our school participate in an annual hate speech workshop organised in cooperation with PLAN. At this workshop, the pupils learn to tell hate speech and angry speech apart and practise methods for preventing or tackling hate speech. The feeling of belonging to a group and the possibility of making your voice heard and exerting influence are essential in preventing hate speech.

Tampereen normaalikoulu aims at supporting togetherness and promoting the pupils' and students' inclusion through such activities as peer supporters, tutor students, a student council and a student association. The student council in the higher comprehensive school organises dancing recesses for lower and higher comprehensive school pupils on a weekly basis, and the teachers offer different types of recess activities, including acrobatics, mindfulness, board games etc. Togetherness days are organised in the general upper secondary school five times a year with the aim of improving the school's operation together and getting to know other people studying or working in the school community. The togetherness days have included a Principal's Question Time to which the students could send their questions in advance,

reflection on the new curriculum, and activities organised by the tutors and the student council. In general upper secondary school, the year groups also organise their own group afternoons once a term. The joint activities are planned together with the group supervisors. At the beginning of the school year, group formation days are organised for pupils in grade 7 and for students starting their first year of upper secondary school.



Lower and higher comprehensive school pupils have practised emotional skills and constructive interaction and discussed controversial issues, for example at morning gatherings, emotional skills lessons and full-length courses. Pupils in grade 9 are offered a free-choice interpersonal relationships course in which they practise constructive interaction methods, including active listening, I-messages, values, value conflicts and their resolution as well as negotiation skills. A similar but more theoretical Interaction patterns course is offered as a school-specific psychology course at the general upper secondary school. The course contents were complemented following the school's participation in the training in Utøya. The Peace School's drama workshops and ODW Finland's school visits are used on the courses. This cooperation has advanced the pupils' emotional skills, including their ability to put themselves in another's position, and broadened their understanding of different cultures and the significance of human rights.

Two teachers from the higher comprehensive and two from the upper secondary school have additionally participated in training on preventing radicalisation offered by the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+, and we came up with the idea of a thematic studies course for the upper secondary school: It was one of us - controversial issues, political and violent radicalism. The objective of the course is to develop skills in identifying, analysing and discussing current controversial topics in a framework of transversal learning and across the boundaries of subjects (social studies, history, psychology). The students learn about theories concerning the causation and manifestations of violent and political radicalism, familiarise themselves with current research on this subject, and develop their critical thinking. The students practise discussing topical issues and events constructively. They improve their critical media literacy. Unfortunately, this course has not yet gone ahead.

Pupils' and students' voices and opinions have been heard using a Google survey in which they were asked about aspects of the school's operation that they were satisfied with or that they would like to influence. Drawing up and updating the equality and non-discrimination plan has also provided the pupils with an opportunity to share their experiences and wishes. Based on the results of an electronic equality and non-discrimination survey sent to all pupils in grades 5 to 9 and upper secondary students and after hearing the student councils, peer mediation training and activities were organised in our lower and higher comprehensive schools, in which eight teachers and 20 pupils participated. Talking about controversial issues, constructive interaction and regular electronic surveys and discussions prepare the pupils and students for making their voices heard also in the future.

At the beginning, finding time for the initial organisation was challenging. Now that we are familiar with the working methods, the activities are run as part of lessons. It is also easier to work on issues with a familiar group than an unfamiliar one. We encourage you to experiment boldly with actions and events aimed at promoting constructive interaction and togetherness. Why not organise an action-based teachers' meeting where you familiarise your teachers with some methods of constructive interaction? This will put the methods at the disposal of all teachers, regardless of their subject.

BJÖRNEBORGS SVENSKA SAMSKOLA - DEMBRA

Erika Ekholm, Monika Strand-Malmberg and Nina Nordlund

Björneborgs svenska samskola, a general upper secondary school for Swedish-speaking students in Pori, accepted the challenge to participate in DEMBRA during the 2019 spring term in January. Our administration started by appointing a “DEMBRA group”. This group was comprised of teachers working at the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels of education.

Our school is a Swedish-speaking co-educational school located in the Finnish-speaking city of Pori on the west coast of Finland. We have approximately 280 pupils and 35 teachers, and the school also maintains the Swedish-speaking kindergarten. We are a private school.

Our very first order of business was to give thought to the various themes being addressed by DEMBRA and we had already decided to have an operating plan in place before the start of the 2019-2020 school year. At this meeting, we could already see that well-being is where we want to put our main focus, but it was important that we also include democracy competence, participation and critical thinking in the work we would be doing.

Following this meeting, we began to chart the things we were already doing within these DEMBRA theme areas and what theme areas would need further development. Much to our surprise, we found that we were already doing a great deal of work related to the DEMBRA themes, but we might not have had such a clear understanding of our efforts as a whole. This helped us in determining our focus: **Increased democratic consciousness for well-being.**

After we finished charting our work, we held our first workshop, which produced new perspectives and new skills, thus resulting in the idea for a full year of planning with DEMBRA. We held an information meeting at the school for teachers, where we explained what DEMBRA is, why it is important from both a school perspective and a societal perspective, and how we can start tackling the challenges to democracy in the school.

From a teacher’s standpoint, there was some concern over this increasing the workload. Our goal has always been to avoid increasing the workload - instead, we wanted to find a way to integrate the DEMBRA work with our daily routine, raising awareness of these perspectives.

Why?

We presented information on what we were already doing within these theme areas and what we could work on. We also pointed out that this was not something only applicable to the DEMBRA team, but something mandatory based on our curriculum and something for which we have a shared responsibility. In our school, we can also include kindergarten in this work, so that the learning path of pupils from kindergarten to upper secondary school is informed by DEMBRA.

“All teachers interpret and work with democracy in different ways, which is a strength in itself, but it is important that they are headed in the same direction!”

How?

Because the workshops provided us with tools to help us examine how we implement this in our own operations, we presented the following idea: Of, through and for, which mean through knowledge, process and activity, i.e. facts, participation and feeling that you have a say. We also explained that all teachers are responsible for approaching the theme in their own way within their subject, choosing a perspective within a given theme, i.e. raise awareness. At the same meeting, we also talked about taking a thematic, subject-integrated and cross-disciplinary approach to work for the whole year.

Examples of activities were given only in brief, but they were helpful to teachers.

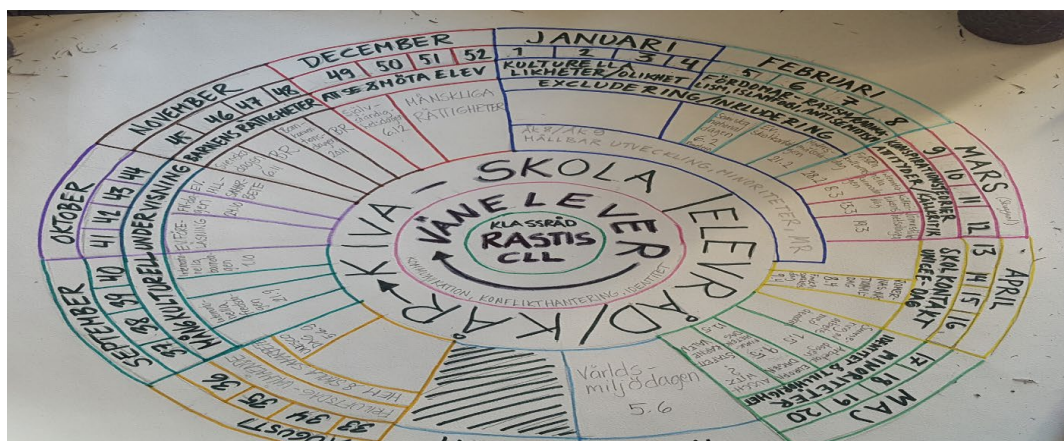
After the meeting, it was evident that all the teachers felt this was an important area to raise awareness, but it remained somewhat unclear as to what each of them could start working on. As a result, we decided to draw up a plan that would not entail additional work and, ideally, be developed into a more “bottom-up” organisation.

We were also given tools, which we used at a meeting to delegate our work among staff. This served as the basis for reminding everyone of their various areas of responsibility.

	Measure – new or existing	DEMBRA principle – why this measure?	Anticipated outcome	Target group (teachers, staff, guardians)	Responsible person	Documentation
Teachers: increasing competence						
Class: educational and interactive relationships						
Work culture						
Local community, stakeholders						
Administration						

This basis is a reminder of who does what and how. This basis also includes a goal for what outcomes are anticipated from “doing”.

Here at Björneborgs svenska samskola, we have begun implementing our plan for increased democratic participation in an effort to raise awareness concerning well-being.



During the 2019-2020 school year, we planned thematic months in line with the DEMBRA perspective. We also hold morning assemblies in accordance with the monthly DEMBRA themes. In order to facilitate the availability of materials for teachers holding morning assemblies, we put together a list of material databases, such as <https://dembra.no/en/>, <https://www.levandehistoria.se/english>, <https://svenska.yle.fi/vetamix> and <https://www.lapsenoikeudet.fi/>, among others.

In order to increase well-being and pupil participation, we have introduced class councils for all grades, with ready-made themes and related questions. These classroom discussions/ideas are addressed in student councils and then forwarded to the school administration. The questions are based on learning environment, learning and treatment of pupils. As it is important to us that the voices of our pupils be heard, we must evaluate well-being in the school and improve our approaches by maintaining a constant dialogue.

Because the school was also working in co-operation with the Central Union for Child Welfare, we felt it was also important to highlight the importance of Children's Rights Week to increased democratic education. Since 2017, we have also worked together with the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL) to increase reading comprehension/literacy among our pupils, which we hope will lead to our pupils having strong skills in source criticism.

This was also demonstrated in workshops on identity for grade 9, called "Are you Finnish?" and "Dimensions in Finnishness". Although the main point was highlighted in the exercises, the rather homogeneous nature of the groups in the school resulted in discussions very much lacking in nuance, and it was readily apparent what kinds of answers the "teacher" was looking for, thus requiring the teacher to challenge the thoughts given. Identity was a more difficult concept to tackle than the reflections on Finnishness.

All the teachers were reminded why this work is so important to us and are definitely in agreement regarding the desired outcome, i.e. a "problem-free" school.

We will end up with an operating approach that actively involves democratic education, values and well-being.

It will increase the pupils' feeling of inclusion and that their voices are being heard - active citizens with a solid foundation in multicultural competence and critical thinking.

I AM IMPORTANT!

I MEAN SOMETHING!

I CAN MAKE AN IMPACT!

Increase the sense of security among our pupils!

Below is a presentation of our morning assemblies and monthly themes.

What's our next move?

The idea is that, after perspectives and themes have been introduced and a "DEMBRA approach" has been adopted, the training of teachers begins. We are currently planning comprehensive workshops with teachers and are bringing in outside experts and lecturers to further strengthen the self-confidence and skills of our staff.

Themed morning assemblies by date:

August - Well-being, Co-operation with Hem & Skola association

- Field day
- Parents meeting and Home & School activities

September - Multicultural education

- Morning assembly, 5-6 September
- Why is the school co-operating with UNESCO?
- THEME FOR STUDENT COUNCIL - School environment? Food?
- Class council;
Is there peace and quiet in the classroom?
Are there fun things to do during recess? (content, choices)
Does the school have good toilet facilities?
Are the classrooms nice?
Are the school meals tasty?
Do you enjoy your lunchtime?
Is there peace and quiet in the cafeteria?
Do you have any wishes?

October - Multicultural education

- 21 September International Day of Peace
- 1 October World Children's Day
- 24 October United Nations Day
- Theme for Student Council - Knowledge and learning
- Class council;
Is it fun to learn new things?
Do you enjoy the different subjects?
Do adults help you at school?
Do you know how you are doing at school?
Do you get enough feedback on the goals you achieve and your accomplishments?

November - Children's rights (school assembly)

- 6 November Finnish Swedish Heritage Day
- 20 November Convention on the Rights of the Child Day - "The right to be yourself"
- Theme for Student Council - Treatment in school
- Class council;
Are we talking about how we treat each other? Do adults treat you properly?
Do adults treat your classmates properly?
Is there anyone teasing someone else based on who they are or how they look?

December - To see and meet pupils

- 6 December Finnish Independence Day
- 8 December Jean Sibelius Day
- Lucia Day
- Theme for Student Council - Evaluation of work done by the Class council in the autumn. How did it go?
Environment at school?
Meals?
Knowledge and learning?
Treatment?

January - Cultural similarities and differences

- 27 January International Holocaust Remembrance Day
- Theme for Student Council - Well-being and security
- Class council;
Do you feel secure at school?
Is there an adult you can talk to?
Do you enjoy school?

February - Prejudices, racism/radicalism, Islamophobia, antisemitism

- 5 February Runeberg Day
- 6 February Sámi National Day
- 14 February Valentine's Day
- 21 February International Mother Language Day
- 28 February Finnish Culture Day (Kalevala Day)
- Theme for Student Council - Well-being and security
- Class council;
Do you feel secure at school?
Is there an adult you can talk to?
Do you enjoy school?

March - Conspiracy theories, attitudes and source criticism

- 8 March International Women's Day
- 13 March Source Criticism Day
- 19 March National Day of Equality
- Minna Canth
- Theme for Student Council - Participation and influence
- Class council;
Do you feel you are being heard?
Are you able to participate in planning your work?
Has the Class council given you anything? What? In what way?

April - School contact, UNICEF project

- If this opportunity comes along again, organise a walk together with Hem & Skola and the other UNESCO school in your city -<https://www.unicef.fi/unicef-kavely/>
- 8 April International Romani Day
- 9 April Finnish Language Day
- Theme for Student Council - Evaluation of the spring work Well-being and security - Secure in school?
Participation and influence - Are you being heard?

May - Minority, Identity and Belonging

- 1 May Labour Day
- 9 May Europe Day
- 12 May Finnish Identity Day
- Summary of work with democratic education (discussion with pupils and teachers, evaluation)
- Stafettkarnevalen relay race event
- Theme for Student Council - Summary of 2019-2020. What worked? What didn't? What can we improve for the 2020 autumn term?

TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS INTO LABS FOR DEMOCRACY

A summary of the Radicalisation Awareness Network document Transforming schools into labs for democracy - a companion to preventing violent radicalisation through education

The purpose of the RAN document is to formulate recommendations for practices aimed at reinforcing democracy which schools can use in sustainable responses to preventing violent extremism. These guidelines complement the Manifesto for Education published in 2015.

Education has to respond to changing contexts and develop innovative approaches and tools to provide sustainable strategies for the prevention of the increasingly complex phenomenon of polarisation which may exacerbate extremist ideologies that might lead to violence. There is no single path leading to radicalisation, and there are many reasons for joining violent extremist movements. It is possible for the school to identify sources of polarisation and intervene in them. The school has the particular task of building protective resilience. Social skills and skills in constructive interaction play a key role. The school can help everyone find their place in the community and grow into active members of society. It can also serve as a safe space for dealing with controversial and difficult topics. We should remember that while radical views are not a problem, violent action is.

In the most recent National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism in Finland, the so-called REDI model is used to describe the school's role in preventing violent extremism. The school builds the resilience of all of its students and helps them deal with topical events and difficult and polarising issues, such as violent extremism and terrorism. In addition, the school intervenes in any problems that are observed and directs the pupils to support measures if necessary. The school is one of the partners in actions aimed at defusing any emerging violent extremism that is detected and in acute security situations. A democratic school ethos is the key to this.

Promoting a democratic school ethos

Extremist ideologies are based on the idea of unchallenged leadership and absolute authority. As a result, they reject the ideas of democracy, pluralism and representation of minority groups.

The school's values are manifested in its operating culture, the way in which the pupils and teachers work together. A democratic school ethos reflects the fundamental nature of human rights and the rights and freedoms of a democratic society. It promotes fundamental rights, including the freedom of opinion, minority rights, equality before the law, and the right to physical integrity. It challenges extremist narratives of authoritarian rule, homogeneity and ethnic or religious supremacy. The school helps the pupils to address controversial issues and conflicting interests and gives them practice in non-violent conflict resolution. In a democratic society, conflict and compromise are the rule, not the exception.

Pluralism

Emphasising a rigid and exclusive identity may appear to offer protection in times of growing diversity. Extremist ideologies exploit such identities, and promote narratives of 'us' versus 'them'. They promote 'authenticity', 'purity' or 'ultimate truth' as alternatives to pluralism and individual choices. Likewise, extremist ideologies often promote heteronormative gender roles as the only right ones.

Promoting diversity implies deconstructing notions of timeless homogenous communities. Communities have always been pluralistic. In addition to countering stereotypes and global education, immigration should also be examined in the light of history. Curricula offer plenty of opportunities for discussing pluralism.

Discrimination

Grievances and feelings of exclusion and injustice are experienced in societies for many reasons. These experiences may foster conflicts at school and at home with peers, parents, teachers and more extensively, society as a whole.

Teaching provides many opportunities to acknowledge and address discrimination and exclusion. Educational institutions have a statutory obligation to carry out non-discrimination work, improving young people's ability to promote equality. It is also important that children and young people are aware of their rights and learn active citizenship skills.

Media literacy

Online media transmits information, produces knowledge and shapes attitudes. Virtual reality offers genuine experiences. Hate speech, fake news and cyberbullying underline the importance of online media. They also play a crucial role in extremist strategies to recruit supporters and to influence public opinion.

Prevention strategies have long relied on government-linked or semi-official counter-narratives. Yet research highlights the importance of authentic and credible voices in challenging extremist propaganda. Media literacy involves raising awareness and understanding not only of the strategies and motives of extremist propaganda, but also of the technical functions and algorithms that contribute to the visibility of content. Media literacy also allows the deconstruction of conspiracy theories and identification of hoaxes. At the same time, it develops responsible media use and provides the pupils with capabilities for participating in online discussion constructively.

Building religious literacy

A lack of understanding of diverse religions and the various ways they can be practised renders students vulnerable to indoctrination and recruitment, and fosters polarised and exclusive patterns of identity. Claiming absolute truth in questions of faith is a key trait of

religious-extremist ideologies. Such uncompromising perspectives are particularly attractive to youngsters, as they provide ready-made answers to daily questions, absolving them of the need to reflect on personal solutions and alleviating the burden of self-responsibility.

Instruction in religion and worldview subjects offers information about different worldviews and the diversity of personal views. Students need to be prepared to participate as citizens in a pluralistic society in order to handle ambiguities and conflicting perspectives and interests. Rather than levelling differences, the goal is fostering shared values and collectively accepted procedures in order to find common ground. Discussions on ethical issues, values and norms should not be confined to lessons in religion and worldview subjects at school.

Peers as facilitators and experts

A democratic school ethos is not built in a day. Processes of radicalisation often involve group dynamics among peers. Young people are influenced by their peers in a different way than by adults. Young people also share the same world of social media and know how to operate in it.

Empowering schools and teachers

Schools with a record of excellence in prevention share the following elements:

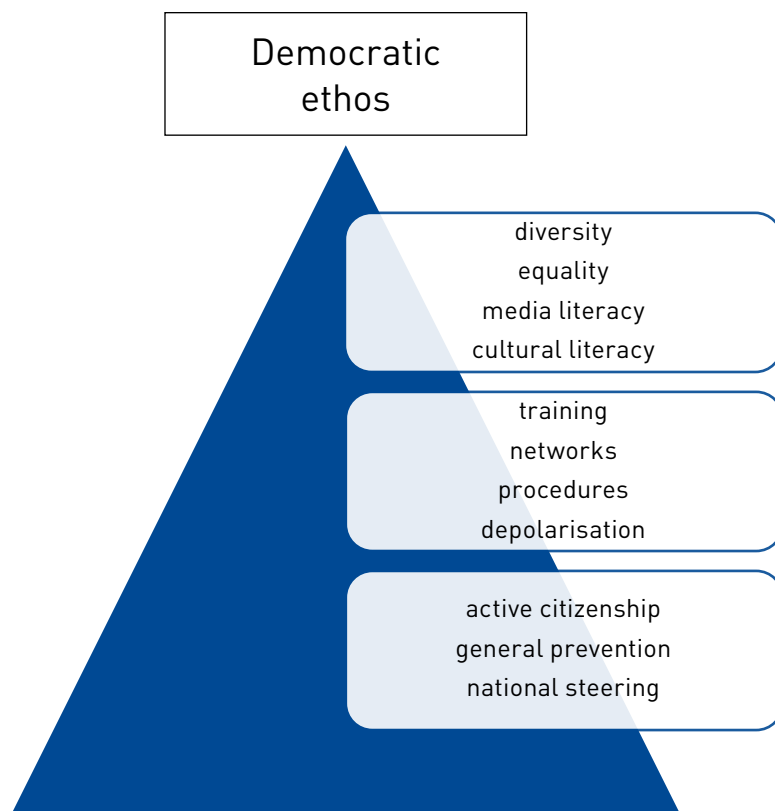
- a) staff are given training sessions and gain experience in on-the-job learning practice;
- b) they have long-term ties with other institutions in professional networks;
- c) they can rely on established procedures to handle (supposed) cases of radicalisation;
- d) they are prepared to deal with other, new problems as they arise.

Developing depolarisation skills

We wish to empower youngsters to be active and use their voices. In order to have open conversations about controversial topics, they must also be able to share and examine extreme ideas. But where should we draw the line?

Four rules of thumb for depolarisation:

- Do no harm; understand the dynamics of polarisation to ensure that your actions do not serve polarisation and its agents.
- Raise awareness and establish response procedures to the first signs of potentially problematic polarisation.
- Effective polarisation management calls for multi-agency cooperation because many actors in society can influence this process.
- Be aware of the vulnerability of teachers with personal backgrounds in some way connected to the situation.



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